

DESTROY ALL COMICS



#2
\$3.50 US
\$4.50 CAN

Welcome to the second issue of Destroy All Comics. Obviously, despite what you may have read in my comic No Hope, I haven't stopped making DAC. In fact, I'm more committed to continuing it than ever. Yes, I must be crazy.

F E A T U R I N G

an interview with Seth

by Dylan Williams with original sketchbook pages by Seth

Comics! Comics! Comics! a column by Jeff LeVine

Frank Robbins 1917-1994 an article by Dylan Williams

comic book reviews by Jeff LeVine

**new comics James Kochalka, Jeff LeVine, Bobby Madness,
John Porcellino, and Eric Searleman**

and letters

This issue wouldn't exist without the kind help of my associate Dylan Williams. It seems to me like he did almost everything good in here, so he should get the most credit. I guess I'm responsible for most everything bad, so I should get all the blame. The next issue should be out sometime in late July, although I haven't yet decided exactly what will be included. I'd like to encourage intelligent readers to submit articles or comics for possible inclusion in future issues. I'd like to see this magazine become more of a meeting place for debate about comics, with you having more of a say. Of course, the only way that's going to happen is if you contribute, so please do.

I guess that's all I have to say, so I'll see you in a certain number of months that will certainly be less than six. Ah...summertime, shorts and sunshine. I can't wait.

Jeff LeVine February 7th, 1995

Please address all comments and submissions to me at:
1574 Hayes St., San Francisco, Ca 94117

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Printed in Canada

an interview with SETH

by Dylan Williams

Seth is the creator of the comic book Palooka-Ville, of which six issues have so far been released. Dylan Williams interviewed him over the phone in January 1995.

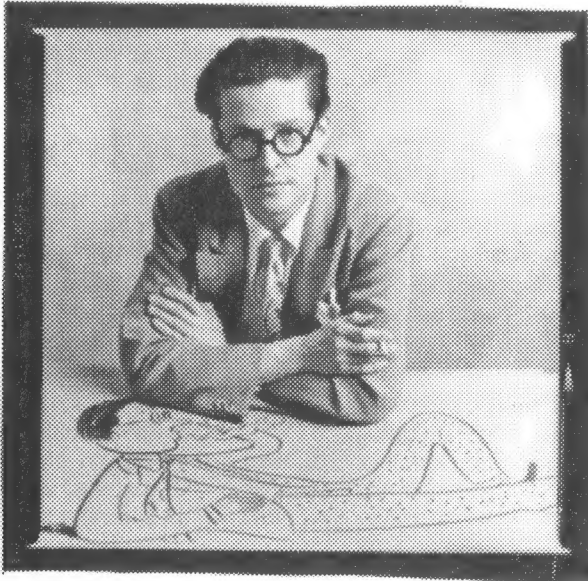


Photo of Seth by Rick McGinnis

SETH: My very first influences in comics or cartooning, the first things that interested me in it, would be a combination of a few newspaper strips. The first would be Peanuts, of course. Peanuts has been a life long interest, and I don't think a point will ever come where I don't love it as much as I do now. Around that same time, there was a Canadian editorial cartoonist who signed his work Ting, although his real name was Merle Tingley, who came to my school when I was in grade one or two, and gave a little lecture, and after that...I think I was always following his work anyways, because like a lot of editorial cartoonists he had a little mascot creature in his drawings that was a worm! You had to look for it in the cartoon, so that was enough to make me interested in it when I was that young, 'cause obviously I wasn't interested in the subject matter. He really inspired me and made me see that people were cartoonists, that there were actually people doing this. That, and my parents used to have certain strips they really liked, which I mentioned in Palooka-Ville. Like

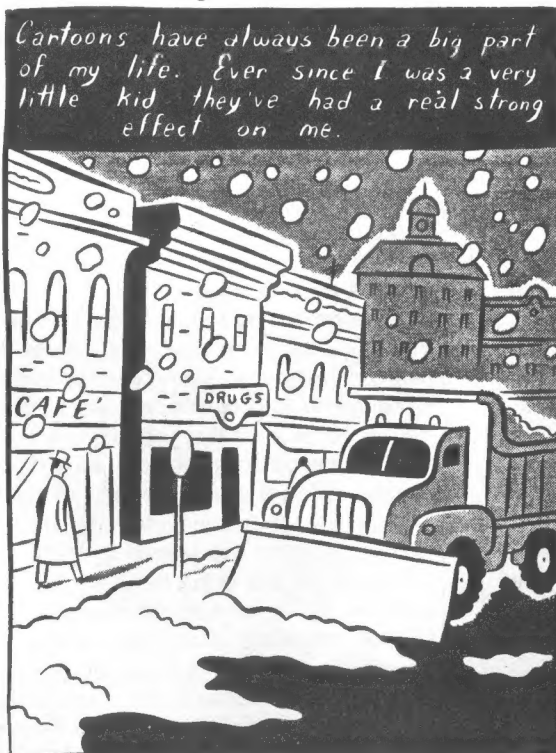
Nancy and Andy Capp, that my mother really liked, were real big favorites of mine, and still are, and this strip called Little Nipper, by Canadian cartoonist Doug Wright, was another thing that I still think is a great strip. These things were probably the first things that got me interested. Like any kid, I was reading a few comics at that time, I was reading Heckle and Jeckles, and Richie Rich and Archie's and stuff, and...

DYLAN WILLIAMS: Did your parents have any anthologies of the cartoonists work, or did they just get it in the paper? Just from the paper. There was a few paperbacks around the house, but the truth is, there weren't ever many books around my family's house. I think my interest in reading and cartooning, is something that really just sprang..I don't even know how it came about, except that I liked the stuff. Because there was no tradition in our family towards the arts in any way, like nobody in my family even was much of a reader.

Did you get the New Yorker?

No, my family was definitely lower middle class. At one point or another, we were even living in a trailer park. So, definitely as a young man I wasn't flipping through the New Yorker, or the New York times or anything. My dad was a mechanic when I was really young, and later he was a shop teacher. I've got to give him credit though. He had a grade three education, and he managed to up it and go back to school and go through teachers college and everything, so in retrospect, it's kind of impressive.

I remember sometime in grade school, actually it was at summer camp, I read some Marvel comics. They were Kirby X-Men. They were in a big box, so they hadn't just come out or anything, and this fired me up. This really got me interested in comic books in a way I'd never been before.



It's funny, when I think about Kirby stuff, those are the ones that I think are the least great, but even then they are so great.

When I look at those, I still have all of them around here somewhere, that stuff just looks great to me. There's a real nostalgic charm to it that's unmistakable. It's really appealing to me. For some reason that got me fired up, and when I got back home, I remember I started watching the Spiderman cartoon on TV and stuff, and then I remember, it kind of clicked together one day, "Hey, Spiderman's in a comic book," so I started buying comic books, and within a few years I was a total Marvel addict. I went through this period, through most of my teen years, of buying and reading every single Marvel comic that ever came out. That's where I developed my drawing ability. If I hadn't loved comic books, I wouldn't have spent that much time drawing. I think it's probably true of an awful lot of people who do comics, since the fact that they were kind of an outsider to the scene, I was definitely a loser in high school. If they had a drawing ability, they would produce their own comic books. I must have drawn hundreds of comic books when I was in high school, all superhero crap, and some horror stuff.

There should be some therapy group for kids like that.

To keep them from ending up at Marvel. I see some groups for those kids, but they don't look too good. They're role playing groups in the back of a comic shop or something. I was fortunate that I didn't know a single other person who read comic books until I was in my twenties. I was horribly ashamed of it, in fact, so there was no way I was going to tell anyone in high school that I was reading comic books. I figured, "I'm enough of a loser, I don't need to add this to the group. They have plenty of reasons to hate me as it is." But that's where I think I really developed my drawing abilities. If it hadn't been for that I probably wouldn't be able to produce a comic book now.

I guess it was around when I went to art school, that I lost interest in those Marvel comics, but I still had interest in the medium. **And you were just doing painting...**

Sure, yeah, I was in a more commercially oriented department... **Were you in illustration?**

I was in what they called communication and design, which incorporated any kind of artwork that was for commercial purposes. I took illustration courses, and I took graphic design courses, and production art, and technique. All those things. But half way through art school, I really realized, "This doesn't do me any good. At the end of this I'm going to end up working on the Jello account or something, this isn't going to make me a cartoonist,"

so I kind of got disenchanted with the whole thing, and that's when I...

So you still wanted to be a cartoonist?

Yeah, even during all this I still wanted to be a cartoonist, I just didn't know what the hell I was going to do with it. I was really kind of mixed up. There's only been one point in my whole life, since I was a kid,

where I didn't think I was going to be a cartoonist, and that was in my third year of art school, and I was really fucked up, and I thought, "This ain't going to happen. This is a dream." I guess this actually would have been right after I dropped out of art school, because I hadn't even drawn anything for about eight months, and I thought, "I'm not going to be a cartoonist. I'm not going anywhere. I'm working at a shitty job, and I'm not doing any art, and what was I thinking anyway, I don't even know what I'm going to do."

What kind of job was it?

I was working in a jewelry factory, assembling costume jewelry. And I was also really fucked up on drugs at that point too, so life really didn't seem like it was heading anywhere.

So, how much art school did you have?

I was there for about two and a half years.

Did you learn all the basics of drawing?

I guess so. I start to wonder what you really learn in art school. It's a good place to kill time.

It depends on the teacher. If the teacher is really teaching you stuff, then it's important, but if it's one of those, "draw how you feel," kind of things...

Yeah. First of all, I think I was too young when I was there. I just wasn't prepared to learn. The truth is, I didn't really have a clue. I remember being in graphic design class, and I didn't even know what graphic design was when I was nineteen years old! I would look at the stuff, and it would seem like some sort of a magic thing to be able to get a graphic design that you would get an A on. I didn't know how it worked. Now, it's like an instinctual thing. You look at something and you can tell what's good graphic design and what isn't, but at that point I was completely lost. I was an idiot, and I didn't learn anything really useful when I was in art school. I feel like most of my learning has come through self-teaching, because you have to learn when you're ready.

I really think that most art schools are a fraud because nobody is really ready to sit down and learn that stuff when they're nineteen.

Exactly.

You have to be like twenty-five, or you have to be mature enough to actually digest the stuff.

I mean, what the hell do you know about anything when you're nineteen, and how can you translate that experience into any sort of an artistic statement. It's pointless. I think the best thing you might get out of art school is a lot of life-drawing classes. That was always fun. I don't know if it helped my drawing, but I sure enjoyed it. It's always a pleasure to draw from the figure.

Yeah, I agree. If you sit down and actually look at things...

It's definitely something every cartoonist should do.

I spent three years straight, all the way through the summer and everything, just going to figure drawing classes.

It's definitely important, because you really can't learn to draw from other cartoonists.

Despite what Todd McFarlane said.

You can learn to emulate their stylistic ticks, but it's not going to help you draw any. When it really comes down to the basics of drawing and composition, you can't learn that from anybody else. You've got to learn that yourself.

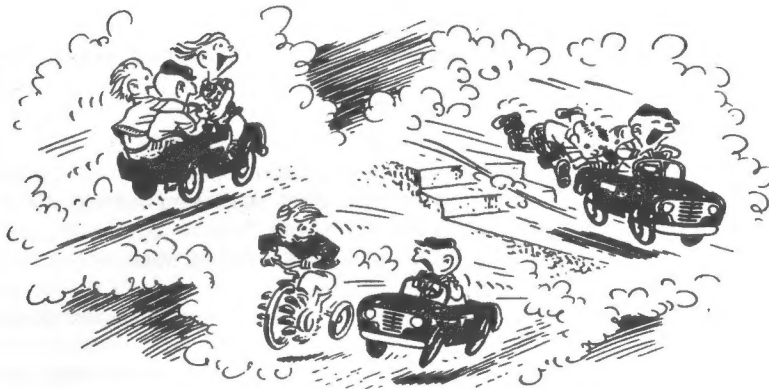
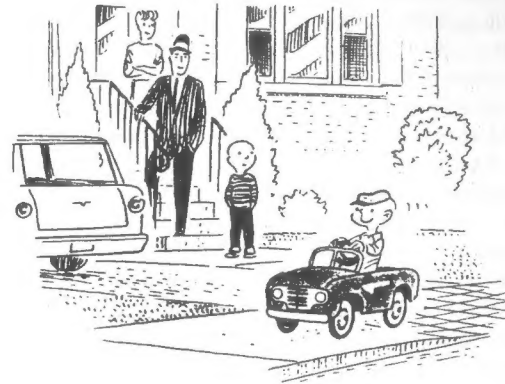
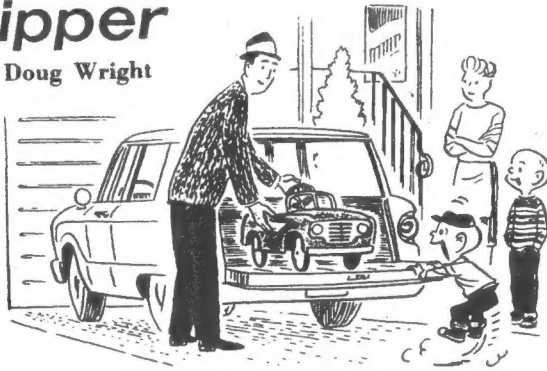
What renewed your interest in cartooning?

I guess when I was about twenty, when I was in art school, I pretty much lost interest in cartooning, for a while. That's because I stopped reading the Marvel comics. I was still interested in comics, but I just didn't realize there was such potential to the medium. So for a couple of years there I just stopped doing any kind of cartooning. I was just goofing around. I dropped out of art school. I started doing a lot of drugs and stuff, and then, I read an ad that Vortex Comics was looking for an artist or something. I went up there and showed them some stuff that I had and they didn't care for it, but this guy Ken Stacy...I don't know if were



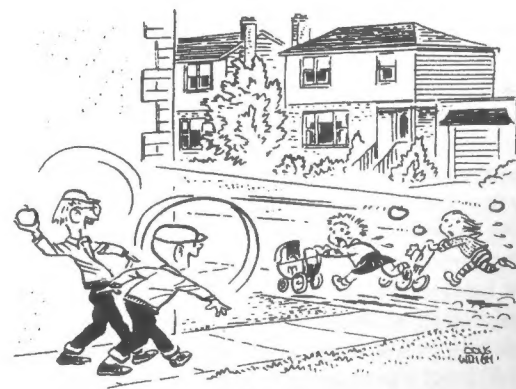
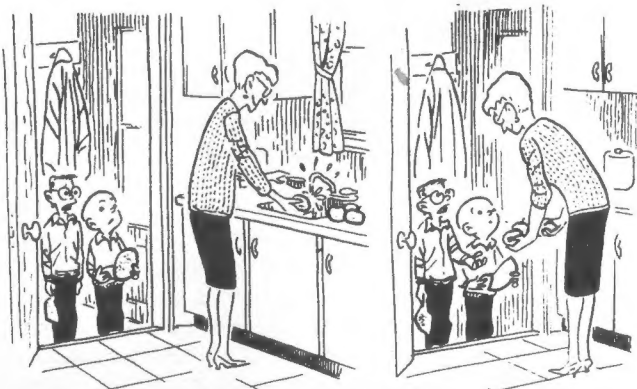
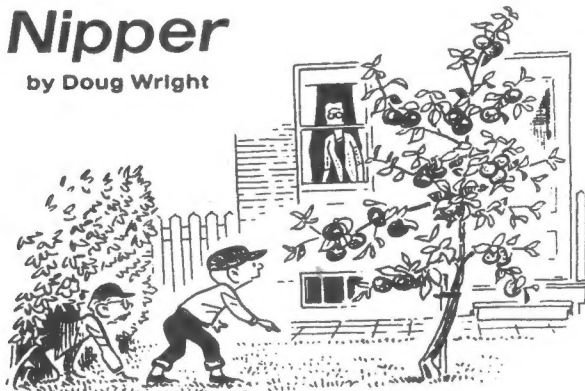
Nipper

by Doug Wright



Nipper

by Doug Wright



An early influence of Seth - Doug Wright...drew "Little Nipper" in Weekend Magazine from some time in the 50's till 1967 when the strip moved over to Canadian Magazine and was re-titled "Doug Wright's Family." One of the great Pantomime strips and much known to Canadians. Doug Wright died in 1984

you've ever heard of him...

The airbrush guy.

Yeah. He took me out to the comic shop, because I told him I wasn't reading any comics and he said, "You gotta buy this Love and Rockets." So this would probably be '82 or '83, and so I picked up issue number three and I started reading Love and Rockets. For a while that's all I read, then I started branching out and reading some other stuff. I was picking up Chester's mini-comic Yummy Fur, and...

Did you know Chester then?

No, I didn't. I wrote him a letter sometime around then, and that's when we made our first contact. We didn't really meet until we both worked at Vortex a couple of years later.

Then I started to get interested in comics again, and started to read some of the undergrounds I'd read as a teenager, but didn't really understand. I started to pick up on Crumb, and started to dig more deeply into the alternative comics scene. I started reading Weirdo and Raw, and stuff like that.

Was that stuff available at any store around there?

Yeah, it was actually pretty easy to find here in Toronto. Toronto is not bad for...the Beguiling wasn't open yet. Which, in my mind, is probably the best comic shop I've ever seen.

That's what everybody says. Except Quimby's, which sounds like it's pretty close.

I haven't heard much about that, but there were a couple of comic shops here that were pretty good. There's a place called the Dragon Lady that had a lot of old stuff, and there was a place called the Silver Snail that carried a fair amount of alternative stuff at that time, although it's pretty much a mainstream store now. But, it was easy enough to find this stuff...American Splendor and things like that, so I got my interest in cartooning revitalized around that time, and that's when I ended up drawing Mr. X.

There was some other comic that somebody told me you drew for Vortex.

I did a bit of stuff in their Vortex magazine. They had an anthology title, but besides that I didn't do anything for them but Mr. X.

What did you feel about doing the Mr. X stuff?

In retrospect, I didn't have any moral qualms about it. Looking back on it, I probably should have had some moral qualms about coming on after the Hernandez Brothers, after Bill had supposedly screwed them around, but the truth is, I didn't really know anything about that at that time. I'd just started reading the Comics Journal, and by the time I was working on Mr. X it wasn't common knowledge that Bill had screwed them around. I suppose I should have made some sort of a moral choice after that, but I just stuck with it. As an esthetic choice, at that point, I didn't really have any esthetic problem with Mr. X. Not until I'd been working on it for a while. I really liked what the Hernandez Brothers had done on it. Looking back on it now, I can really see that the stuff they did on it was really second rate compared to their Love and Rockets work, but at the time it seemed great to me. So, I was happy to get the job at first.

Great by regular standards too.

Yeah, exactly.

The best of the schlock.

Yeah. So, by the time I left the book it felt like I'd made a major mistake working on it. The only thing that I can say really good about it is that it forced me to draw a lot, and develop my style a bit. Whenever I look at those Mr. X's, which is almost never, I can really see that I was learning to draw better through them. From the beginning to the end it's a real inconsistent bunch of comic books. At least it prepared me for what came later.

But if it was now, I certainly wouldn't be taking on a project like Mr. X.

Have you ever talked to David Mazzucchelli, because what you're saying there sounds like what happened with him too.

Yeah, I guess so. I've only met David Mazzucchelli once and it was for about two minutes, so we didn't really have any time to talk. It seems like sort of a miracle to me that he got out of that world. He's the only one. I don't know anybody else who has gone into mainstream comics, real Marvel/DC, and ever come out to produce anything worthwhile.

Really it's the opposite. There's all these underground guys who are now ending up working for Marvel and...

Yeah, that's sad.

It's horrible.

I just think those places soul destroying. You can't go in there when you're twenty years old, and then five years later, after doing that, come out, and still have an artistic vision. It just warps you. You're surrounded by all these people who think the same way and have the same interests, and I think you probably get sucked in, like any kind of a corporate structure. I'm sure that if I'd gone to Marvel Comics at nineteen, and they'd said, "You can draw our books," I'd just be a hack now, 'cause there's no way you can survive it.

I think if you have a strong enough vision, like with Mazzucchelli, I think that's what it is. His vision is so intense.

His old friends there must think he's nuts.

Actually, he has this great story about Rob Liefeld looking at his stuff and going, "What happened to him? Oh my God! This doesn't make any sense."

I believe it. They must just think he's a kook.

Which is great!

Yeah. Well, considering none of those guys can draw, they're certainly nobody to be judging anything.

Did you have a lot of freedom on Mr. X to do stuff, or did he just, I don't know...I haven't even read those actually.

Well, don't bother. Yeah, I had a lot of freedom. The guy I worked with, Dean Motter, who was the writer, he would basically just give me the dialog for the book, and I would just break it down, and design the characters and whatever. But even so, it's not a satisfying experience even when you have that much control. You're not writing it and you're not coloring it, and they won't even let you do the cover. It's kind of soul destroying too, when you're drawing the book and they say to you that you're not good enough to do the cover. It makes you wonder, "Why am I good enough to draw the insides of the book, then?" Ultimately, I just don't believe in working with writers anyway. I think it's a pretty rare exception when that works out.

If there's a collaboration, isn't..

I guess that's why I have this opinion. I can't collaborate, so I judge everything from that. I find it hard to imagine...I suppose I could collaborate with Chester, but then I often think, "but, what's the point?" Both of us can just do our own work. We don't need to get together on anything. It's rare for me to find anybody that I can enjoy working with that much that I'd ever want to collaborate with them.

I'd like to see you and Chris Ware do something.

That would be interesting. I just can't imagine it.

How did you get into illustration?

That was a plan on how to get out of comics, so I could do my own comic. When I left Mr. X...I had a friend Maurice Velikoop...you've probably seen his work in Drawn & Quarterly, well, he's a big illustrator, and I could see he was making a lot of money. I thought to myself, there's no way I could work on Mr. X, for example, and do a comic book of my own on the side. It's just too much work. But I thought if I did illustration, I could make more money for less work, and still manage to get my comic book out on the side. But that really didn't work out too well, because for the first couple of years of illustration I had to work so hard to build up any sort of a career, that I was working seven days a week on illustration.

Was this before Palooka-ville came out?

Yeah, this was the couple of years in-between those two books. So, finally it was so busy I just had to say, I'll have to schedule my time better and do less illustration, and get the comic done. So basically that's what I've done now. I just take as much illustration as I need, and just use the other time on the book. Ultimately it worked out, but for the first couple of years...

Do you have people coming to you for jobs?

It depends, it's really hot and cold.

That's what makes me never want to do illustration. Every time I've tried to, I have a great job for a week, then after that it's dead for the next month.

It's scary being a free-lancer, but I've had steady work for the last five years. There's been some points where I've been down to my last buck, and I'll get scared and start thinking, "I better find a representative, or something," because the works drying up, but then some more always comes. The recession was kinda tough, because illustration really dropped, but the last six months, or whatever, it's been really good. I've been getting lots of work and I've been able to have enough money to take a month off to work on the comic, and stuff like that. So, it's been pretty good lately, but I'd like to get out of illustration.

Where have your illustrations appeared?

Well, they appear mostly in Canadian magazines.

Like travel magazines, or stuff like that?

Lifestyle magazines, newspapers. I do a lot of work for one of the newspapers here in town. In lifestyle magazines I do a lot of restaurant illustrations. I've done work for New York magazine and the Washington Post. I almost did some work for the New Yorker this year, but that didn't work out. I did a cover for them, but it ended up getting killed.

For the New Yorker?

Yeah.

Wow.

It didn't see print. It was pretty disappointing for me because I was really looking forward to seeing it on the cover, but it didn't come through.

I'd think they'd see your style and go, "This guy is for us."

I'd like it, but...they sent me a thing telling me all the new holidays coming up, if I want to submit some ideas, so...we'll see. I was pretty bummed out when the cover didn't see print, so I've got to build up my enthusiasm again, to try to work up some ideas.

I don't really like their system. They send out these newsletters to everybody. So you've probably got like fifty people competing for that Valentine's Day cover, and they probably just pick

the best one. I prefer the old the old commission idea, when they call you up and commission you specifically.

That's treating it like art. They don't want to do that anymore.

Yeah, well, I just wanted that big fee too. They pay very well.

That's what I hear.

But once you get in, it seems like it's pretty good. People like...whose been doing covers lately a lot...well, certainly Art Spiegelman has.

David Mazzucchelli's done a couple.

Yeah, Mazzucchelli really seems to have his foot in the door now. I must have seen like three or four covers by him so far.

There's a Mattoti cover on the new one.

I think he's already done a cover for them, so that would make sense. And I've seen Zingerelli...quite a few cartoonists are doing stuff for them now, which is good, 'cause that's like the old tradition. I prefer that than getting illustrators to do the covers.

Yeah, Evan Dorkin has a theory that with comic artists getting more illustration jobs, that it's maybe gonna open people's minds up to comic books.

I think he's kidding himself.

Nothing will do it.

Yeah, I'm pretty cynical about that.

What makes you chose the specific events you write about. Is it that they just stick in your mind and they keep on coming up?

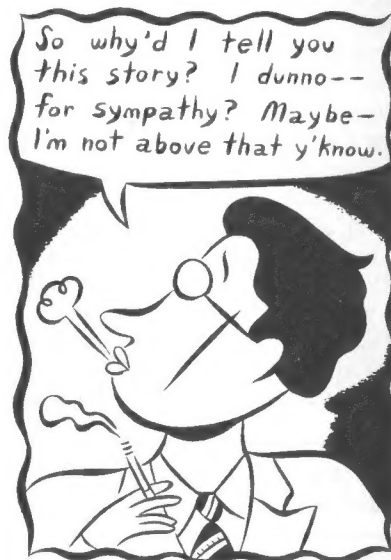
You mean like the specific events within the story, or the different storylines in general?

The different stories in particular. Are they things you want to deal with, or are they just unresolved issues?

For the first three issues, I look at them really differently than from issue number four on. Especially with the first issue, I feel like, this was my first comic story, and I think I made a fatal

mistake. I picked something which is like a good anecdote, which is the kind of thing you might tell to some friends, to get some laughs or whatever, but a good anecdote very rarely makes a good story. I don't really feel like I knew what I was doing with the first issue.

With the storyline that started in the second issue, that ran in two and three, I felt like I had a better grasp of what I wanted to do, but I still didn't really know how to pull it off. When I look at that story now, I see that it should have been at least six issues long, and I should have paced it really differently. But, I had to do those to learn, first. Starting with issue number four I really felt like, "Now I know what I want to do and how to approach it." The way I look at it now, I would pick a story that has some potency, beyond being just something interesting that happened to me. This is kind of my complaint with a lot of autobiography, like what Dennis Eichhorn does, for example. It's too much of, "Here's some weird shit that happened to me," and there's not any real introspection attached to it. I feel like there has got to be a point in telling a story. Obviously, or then there's no point in telling it. So now, I would pick a story more for what I want to say with the





story, rather than with the specific events of it. In my mind, the events are secondary.

In "It's a Good Life If You Don't Weaken" the search for Kalo is more of a catalyst for the story. It's just the motor that makes it run. To me, it's not the most interesting thing about it.

What's the most interesting thing about it?

The most interesting thing would be, my underlying points of what I'm trying to say about life. Which will involve why Kalo is in the story, but it has a lot more to do with basically trying to explain how I feel about the world, and that's just the plot to build it around.

That's a big point for a lot of cartoonists, when they start realizing there should be a purpose...

Yeah, exactly. So much of cartooning has had to do with entertaining, and because of that I don't think most people come to the medium thinking they have to have something to say. They just think they have to manage to entertain people. So you get into this whole thing where you do one or two page stories, and if you get somebody to laugh, that's good. They never really reach that point where you really have to say something, which of course, is the most important thing if you're going to be a writer of any sort.

Yeah, most people don't approach it like it's writing.

Exactly. You've got too many people who've definitely spent too many years working on their drawing. They didn't realize they had to work on their writing too. It certainly happened to me. I mean, I'm thirty-two years old, and I'm just figuring what to do with the writing now, I'm just starting to figure it out.

When was the stuff in Drawn & Quarterly, in relation to Palooka-ville?

I think the first thing I had that appeared in Drawn & Quarterly came out before Palooka-ville, and then the next stuff probably came concurrent to the first couple of issues.

So that's probably the first thing you'd ever written?

I guess I wrote a couple of really crappy things in that Vortex Magazine, and I guess I did a couple of one page strips here and there, before. But, I would probably put that as the first stuff I'd be willing to admit to.

It's interesting to see a progression in artists.

It's always more interesting to see from the other side, but it's pretty painful to look at your own early stuff.

Oh yeah.

But, it never bothers me to look at early stuff by other cartoonists that's really bad. I think it's interesting.

Personally, I'd kill to get any of the stuff Charles Schulz did before Peanuts.

The Little Folks. I've got the teenage stuff.

You've got the little folks book?

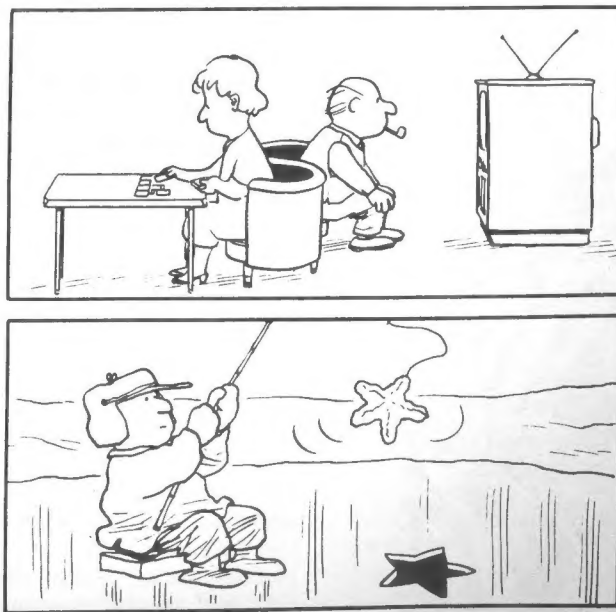
No. No. Actually, I was thinking, in my next issue of Palooka-ville, I was going to put a request, if I have anybody who lives in Minneapolis/St. Paul to xerox that stuff off the microfilm for me, and I'd gladly trade them some original art for it, because I'd really like to get my hands on that. There's two years worth of it.

I can see if Bill Blackbeard has some, 'cause he might. He doesn't really like the early stuff. It's funny, I was having this conversation with him, where he was complaining how bad it was in the first couple of books.

I love that first couple of years.

I know, it's totally... That's a perfect example, like Schulz isn't proud of it at all. He thinks it's bad, so he's not going to reprint it at all.

It's Only a Game by CHARLES M. SCHULZ



Non-Peanuts Schulz from 1957

Yeah, I was reading an interview with Schulz about a year ago where somebody was suggesting that he turn Lil' Folks into a book, and he was like, "Nope. Nope. I don't want that to see print." And it's too bad, 'cause I'd like to get my hands on it. I think the drawing was really beautiful too. It's definitely a different animal than early Peanuts stuff and the Lil' Folks, than the later Peanuts stuff, but it's still nice. I like it.

That's why you should reprint your early stuff in one book. Well...

Do you think about people not relating to you work at all? It's an issue to me...I do this stuff, I'm really interested in the 50's, and people don't relate to it at all, because it's not auto-bio, and it's not this, or whatever.

I don't think about it, because I don't think I really have that much connection with my audience, that I'm ever talking to them personally or anything. I get letters from people, and usually, you just get letters from people who like what you're doing. I don't know. Joe and I have talked about this kind of thing,

'cause I think Joe is very conscious of his audience. He's aware of them. I don't think about it that way. When I'm writing the comic I just think, I pretty strongly just think, write what you want to read. I assume that my audience is smart enough, I could be over-estimating them, but, to over look these lifestyle differences. Sometimes I'm aware of it. I think, "Here, I'm insulting these trendies, they might be part of my audience and they might be pissed off," but I think, "You know, that's life."

Yours is the first comic I've read where I actually felt some kind of identification. Normally, like I read Joe's stuff, and I think he's a jerk, but his stories are always great, so I'm really interested in it, but I don't identify with his lifestyle, but with you, both Jeff LeVine and I, we can relate to the idea of going to a book store and pouring through these racks of stuff, just to find this one thing that nobody else would care about.

I appreciate that, and I'm surprised to find out that most of the letters I get are from people who say they relate to that.

Wow.

So maybe there are more like minded people out there than we think. Who knows? But yeah, I usually don't assume that the audience is going to relate, 'cause I feel kind of like an oddball sometimes.

But, it's just that you feel like you have to do it.

Yeah, exactly.

Crumb talks about that too.

I really related to Crumb when I was younger, especially, I remember that story, That's Life, where he's lookin' for the old records. That really struck a chord in me when I was about twenty-two. I don't feel that Crumb influenced me, but I feel that when I first read Crumb, there was that feeling that he confirms your own thoughts...

You don't feel so crazy.

Yeah, and I really did feel that his interest in old time things made me feel a certain confirmation that this wasn't a weird interest.



Are you aiming your story, It's a Good Life... at other cartoonists?

I guess that's in the back of my mind, but part of me...I'm thinking, I've seen plenty of movies about film directors, and hundreds of novels about authors, and I feel like I can relate to that. That's why I put the glossary in there though, because I figure, I don't assume the audience knows who I'm talking about, but it doesn't really matter. It's almost incidental if I'm talking about a cartoonist, what's more important is whatever point I'm trying to bring up about life. I'm just connecting it to cartooning because that's the way I am. I figure it's a good enough metaphor, 'cause Salinger can bring in haiku if he wants, so I figure I can bring in...

Herge.

Exactly. I assume that an audience reading comics has some interest in cartooning, so they should be able to relate.

It's worked on a lot of people. I work in a comic book store, and they're interested in these other people 'cause you mention them.

That's good. I'd really like to think I'm turning on somebody to some artist or another.

That's my goal as an artist too...to make people aware of these older people who were so great.

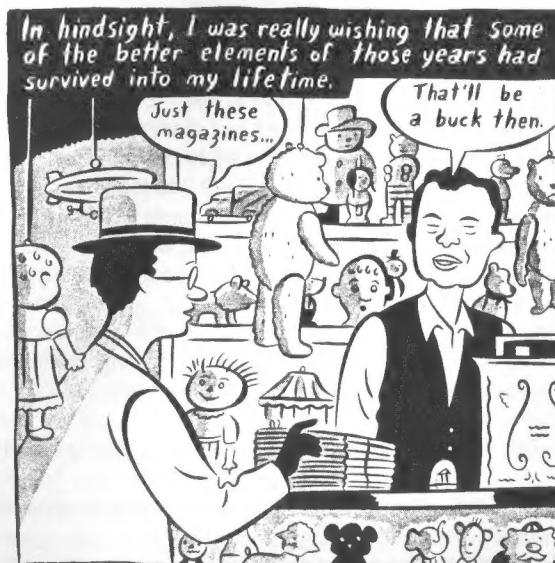
Sure. There really is a ton of great cartooning out there, and it's a real shame that most cartoonists don't have much of an interest in it.

In the story where you're showing Chester, I totally identified with that. I have so many friends, I'll show them this great comic and they'll be looking at the ad pages or something like that.

You know, like I said, I think people have been trained to look at the past through the eyes of kitsch and it's hard for them to see the quality of things that aren't new and hip, unless it has some sort of a trendiness attached to it. Like suddenly the seventies are hip, but if it wasn't hip, I don't think anybody would be looking back at the seventies looking for any real quality or anything. And they're not bringing back anything from the seventies that were quality, they're just bringing back kitsch stuff, and I think that's the way pop culture operates. You can only appreciate things through a sort of ironic looking backwards, and that's bullshit.

"Wasn't it stupid that they did this, and funny, ha ha."

Exactly. Instead of seeing that some things in the past might have actually been superior. Certainly, looking at cartooning, you see an awful lot of evidence that things were better in the past. Like the newspaper strips for example. Such great strips. When



you sit down and read a huge run of Little Orphan Annie...

Actually, that's the next thing on my list after this huge pile. Once you get into it, it's so engaging. Harold Gray might be kind of right wing, but his actually storytelling is terrific. It's really fascinating stuff.

I think it's neat. Even if I disagree with the politics, or all that of the artist, it's really interesting to me when people are really opinionated. Because otherwise it's just bland and boring and lifeless. Like Steve Ditko, I don't know if you like him...



Sure, I love Ditko. He's completely insane...

Totally.

And yet, he's doing these things that are really passionate. You can sense that he really believes in what he's doing.

Oh, yeah.

Even though it's...

It's crazy, but yeah, I think he's another example of someone interesting who actually got out of the mainstream in a way. It

may be crazy stuff, but what other mainstream artist is out there, that passionate at that age? It's surprising actually.

A lot of them are, but they've been pushed down so far, that they can't put it into their work, that they feel nobody wants to hear about it, 'cause I've talked to a bunch of people and they all have the same kind of opinions on life and stuff, but they just don't want to put it into their work.

I can imagine that probably at this point it's hard for them to view cartooning as personal expression.

Yeah.

It's just been a job all these years.

Exactly.

I don't bother putting much personal expression into illustration. That's just, get it done and get the money.

Yeah, that's what they thought cartooning was, and yet they were so great.

I know, it's true.

I remember when I started Palooka-ville. It was right around the time I met Joe, and Chester had just started doing autobiography, and suddenly everybody seemed to be doing autobiography. It occurred to me, "Gee, I don't want it to look like I'm jumping on a bandwagon." The thing was, I'd come to the conclusion that what seemed to be the most interesting work at the time was Pekar, Linda Barry and stuff like that, that seemed to be autobiographical, and it inspired me to try it myself. Then, like a year later, there was like ten people doing it, and it seemed sad. I thought, "Jesus Christ!" This autobiographical thing...which actually, I'm getting out of soon.

Oh, really?

At the end of this storyline, the next piece I'm going to do will be fiction.

It seems like this story is not so much autobiographical as philosophical. It's your thoughts on things.

Yeah, It's certainly more constructed than a straight autobio-

graphical piece. When I'm writing this, I'm not the least bit concerned with factual accuracy, whether I was in this spot, or that spot, or anything like that. I think that's a weakness of autobiography anyway, sticking to the facts too closely...unless you're writing your autobiography, but I don't really think of autobiographical comics that way.

Yeah, your stuff seems to transcend it. Even Joe Matt's stuff, that's it genre, but it's not, I don't know, I would read it if he was doing it as Uncle Scrooge. I would put him on the same level as Carl Barks. I think he has a real knack for storytelling.

Yeah, Joe is what I would call a real natural talent. I don't think I've ever met anyone with so much natural talent, that's not like an intellectual talent. He just does what he does. I don't think of him the same way I do of Chester. I really think Chester is a genius, and I don't know too many people I would class as a genius. He's a really individualistic thinker. I really feel his work comes out of the intellect, where with Joe I feel like it comes out of some reserve of natural talent. They're two different approaches entirely. They're both really different.

I think he's in this lineage of storytellers in comics, there's only been a few of, like Shelly Mayer, people who just had this story in them to tell. When I get Peepshow and take it home it's the first thing I read out of the whole stack because his stories are so gripping. I'm like that with Uncle Scrooge too.

Your right. It does have a real natural storytelling slant. It's not tricky. It's just very direct, and it really does work. I know Joe so well now it's getting hard to separate Joe and his work. I can't look at it as a casual reader anymore, because it's so connected to the creator in my mind. I'm judging it against what I know to be true or not, like how he's portraying himself and things like that...it's getting kinda close to home.

Does it get in the way of you criticizing his work?

No, I don't think so. I'm pretty brutal with Joe. We have that kind of relationship for some reason. I'm the bully and he takes it, and because of that I can be pretty harsh with him about him. We regularly, both Chester and I, both make fun of his Peepshow collection, the one from Kitchen Sink, especially those first fifteen pages. We're always picking on him for that.

(laughs) That does seem really funny to me now, when I see him in a panel saying he fancies himself a bluesman, that cracks me up. That's like a total fantasy. We always pick on him about that one. We always pick on how wrong he is about himself in those interpretation of himself in those Peepshow pages. He's pretty easy-going though. He likes constructive criticism.

Do Chester and him do it back to you?

Sure.

Do they offer you a lot of criticism?

Yes and no. It's a funny thing. With each of us, when we finish an issue, and now that Chester is back in town this is definitely true, we'll get together and let the other two read it and take criticism. But, I make it a point to only show them the issue when it's completely done. I'll take the criticism, but I'll never change anything, unless it's like a technical point. Like they say to me, "This really doesn't read, it looks like he's coming from the wrong direction," or something. I might take that and change something, same with Chester. He rarely will change anything if you don't like it, but we certainly might criticize each other back and forth.

Does it have any effect on your future work?

It might. I certainly respect their opinions, and things Chester has told me have certainly stuck in my mind and made me think about things I'm doing, especially from a technical standpoint. I have so much respect for Chester that I really will take his opinion to heart.

Are there any other artists, that you correspond with?

I have casual correspondence with other cartoonists, but really not much in the way of criticism. I correspond lightly with David Collier, but we don't really criticize each others work or anything. We usually just say things like, enjoyed your last issue. But yeah, it's pretty tight here in Toronto, we're very close in discussing our work with each other.

It totally helps developing as an artist to have feedback.

Yeah. Chester has been a huge inspiration to both Joe and I. He's just light years ahead. I can't underestimate how much reading Chester's work has made me re-evaluate how I think storytelling should be. I think Chester's greatest talent is how he tells a story. It's really his own approach.

I haven't read Underwater yet, but my girlfriend has read it and she was telling me about it, and I couldn't help but think of Sugar and Spike. I hate it when people try comparisons, but do you think that had any...

Influence on him? He's never read any Sugar and Spike. I was talking to him about Sugar and Spike, just in the last few weeks, 'cause I've been reading a lot of it lately, and I had to explain the premise of the strip to him because he didn't know anything about it.

Wow.

It's such a great strip.

It seems like, what he's getting at so far, from what I've heard second hand, is the idea of children's interpretation of the world.

I think you're right, but I don't know, because the truth is, Chester doesn't really tell me what he's doing, and I don't ask either, because I know he doesn't want to talk about it. He wants you to just find out as you're reading it too, but from my impression that's what he's doing. It seems to me like he's showing how a child perceives the world and how he's gradually coming to understand language and things like that. At least that's my guess. I could be completely wrong.

And that's kind of what Sugar and Spike is about too...

Sure, although certainly from a lot more entertaining point of view.

Yeah. It's kind of like a weird combination of Joe and Chester. Yeah, Shelly Mayer is a genius. Have you ever read any of his Scribblys?

I've only read a little bit of it 'cause I can't get my hands on the original comics.

I have one that's worth a bunch of dollars that I bought for ten bucks.

Well, I'm putting feelers out now, and I'm telling myself I'm willing to pay the money, 'cause I want to get my hands on them pretty badly. They're right at the top of my list of old comics to get my hands on.

Have you seen the Smithsonian comic book?

Oh yeah, there's a bit in there. There's also a bit in The Greatest



by Johnny Craig from Exrta #2, from 1955

Golden Age Comics Ever Told, from DC Comics, but just a bit, like four pages or something.

Do you like Krigstein at all?

I wouldn't say I'm not a big fan. I like him. He's not on my big list of favorites. I like Jonny Craig better, if I had to pick between the two.

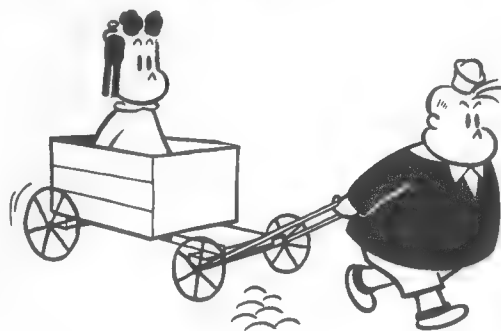
Man, that's a strange choice. I mean, I haven't heard other people say that. I like Craig too.

I think Craig has such a clean approach, and he tends to tell his stories less copy heavy, 'cause he was writing most of them, whereas Krigstein was working with Feldstein or whoever. I've always found E.C. comics way too copy heavy. So, of the E.C. artists, I'm definitely drawn to Kurtzman and Jonny Craig. Especially Kurtzman.

I'm doing a big thing on E.C. comics for the next Destroy All Comics. I know it's a dead horse, but...

It's still great stuff though. It's like a miracle that it's all in print in hardback.

And now they're coming out with some in a cheap format so the regular comic reader can buy it.



Little Lulu, by John Stanley

Yeah. I wish they'd do that with the Lulu stuff. I've got all the hardbacks, but wouldn't it be great if kids could buy those Little Lulu comics issue by issue again. They're some of the greatest cartooning ever done, in my mind.

That's why I think it's really important to do stuff like that glossary, because I think if you bring it up enough, maybe people will start to be interested in it, so that there will be a

readership. For all those Popeye reprints and stuff, there was no readership, so the just failed. They all lost money and nobody ever wanted to do them again. But if as artist, you bring up an interest, then people might...

I hope so. When I was young it worked for me. When I was reading Salinger when I was nineteen, I started to develop an interest in Japanese poetry because of it. If there was anybody whose work I liked and they talked about another artist in it, I would check it out, because I respected their opinion.

I'm making a big point in everything I do to mention something.

I'm always bringing people to the apartment and showing them stuff.

Is that a picture of your apartment on the back of the Peepshow collection?

Yeah, it is.

I was re-reading the issues of Palooka-Ville, and then I went to the store and I looked at that graphic novel, 'cause you did that piece in the back and I noticed the Little Lulu's and the Tubby's all on that little rack.

Yeah, it's my place. It's Joe pretending it's his place.

He really wants to own those comics (laughs).

(laughs) I know. Well, Joe's too cheap to buy stuff. That's the problem.

Are people sending him stuff?

They send him view-master reels. I've got a few of those too. I've actually been lucky enough that a few people have sent me great cartooning stuff. I've been amazed. I got a terrific collection of this cartoonist Roland Coe, in the mail from one guy, and I was so happy. It's from 1936 or something, and it's just gorgeous stuff. And I got a couple of other old gag collections from people through the mail who just sent the to me, and I was thinking, "This story is working out well. I didn't plan on this." But keep sending it. That's always nice. And of course, you get a million mini-comics.

Which is great too. Actually, I wish I got more. I don't really get anything.

One thing that's kind of depressing about it, is sometimes you get more mini-comics then you do letters about your comic. You go to the mailbox and you see four envelopes...and you're like, oh no, because you're kind of hoping somebody had some comments on the last issue. Even so, actually it's been going pretty good. I've been getting a fair amount of mail lately.

Your stuff is really inspiring, to me at least.

I appreciate that.

I can't criticize it, because I think it's so good, it stands on its own.

Can you describe the techniques you use, like duo-shade, and brush and painting and stuff? How do you draw your strip?

Okay. First of all I work with a light table. What I do is, I use xerox paper...I always draw a grid out for each page, and then I do my panels one by one on a separate sheets of paper, so that I can work them up at the light table, 'cause I like to do a lot of drawing on each panel until I get the compositions exactly the way I want. The I tape that in onto the page grid. After I have the issue pencilled out, I use water color paper to draw on it, so I take this pencilled page and I tape it on the back of the watercolor paper, and then I just slap that on the light table, and then I just go in with a brush and ink the whole thing. After that I do an overlay for where the grays will go and that's dropped in by the printer.

Oh. Everybody was theorizing that you use duo-shade.

No. I thought about playing around with that Craft-tint paper.

That's it.

I thought about trying it around, because Roy Crane, his stuff is

so great looking on it. Do you want me to talk about my color techniques?

Sure.

Basically, it's pretty straight-forward. Most of the time I work with Dr. Martins dyes for coloring. That's my basic method that I use most of the time, like the covers for numbers three and four. I just do a basic black and white drawing and then color it with Dr. Martins dyes.

On overlay?

Nope, I dye it. Like an original watercolor painting, basically. I do a few other things, but mostly I use dyes.

The one thing I have no clue about is color.

Well, it's really something I think a lot of cartoonists have trouble with because you don't work with it that much. The first couple of years of illustration, I really had to struggle with learning color.

Did you learn it from school or...

No, I just...

Did Chester, Joe or anybody else help you?

I didn't know Joe then, and Chester just cut Rubyliths for his covers up until then. I knew in illustration I wouldn't be doing that, so I just basically decided to use Dr. Martin dyes and I spent a few months teaching myself how to use them. And for the first year of illustration I must have done every illustration over two or three times to get it right, because I just didn't have the technique figured out yet. Now it's pretty straight-forward to me. I'm still learning to do better effects with it, but it's pretty easy once you get it down. I think the real talent is finally getting to a point where you have your color choices working out, 'cause there's always a tendency to be garish at first.

The cover for the new Drawn & Quarterly is really good., and moody.

I wasn't completely satisfied with the printing. A couple of undercolors showed up on the whites, so that kind of disappointed me, but besides that, it's okay.

It has some kind of feeling.

Well, I like a lot of folk art, so that inspired me to start painting with house paint a few years ago. It's a great medium actually. It really lays down great.

Yeah.

And you can mix colors really well too, and you get a ton of paint of course, so it's really great.

I'm doing a piece in acrylics actually. It's going to be my first painted thing.

Acrylics are a good medium for easy control. I'm going to try to figure out gouache soon, actually. I know Julie Doucet does some great stuff in gouache. She's really skilled with it.

Like what kind of stuff?

Like her covers for Dirty Plotte. They were all done in gouache, and a really nice job too. Fiona Smyth is really good at it too.

She's one of my



Fiona Smyth art

favorite cartoonists now a days.

I've known Fiona for years. She went to art school with me, actually.

She's doing the future too, for me. She's taking the past, but she's also building something new out of it.

It's interesting that she's suddenly come into comics, because she's primarily a painter. Her and Maurice Velekoop, we all went to art school at the same time and they both entered into comics just from playing around with them for a few years, now they seem to be doing quite a lot of them.

It's a really interesting medium, as an artist.

I think so. Sure.

The possibilities are endless.

Personally, I think it's a more exciting medium than painting, because so many people get to see your work, as opposed to just a gallery show. Unless you're a huge painter, world famous. Otherwise, you're getting only a few hundred people to see your work, when in comics, even in a worse case scenario, you're getting a thousand or two.

Yeah. Does that feedback help you grow as an artist? Do you do things in stories, then people point it out?

Sometimes. I think that feedback is important. You've really got to feel like you're communicating with people. It really helps. I think that the main reason you do art is the desire to communicate something. So you definitely want some feedback.

That's a big debate with me and my friends about communications with comics. I feel like you should be making people think, and that's sometimes even more valuable than communicating.

I kind of think of them in the same level. Communicating should be something that makes people think, otherwise, there's not much point in communicating it.

Like Fiona's stuff, a lot of them, is just single images, I guess they do kind of tell a story, but it's also...

Fiona and I disagree on a basic point. She has stated that she doesn't believe plot is important. This runs completely diametrically opposed to how I view telling a story. I feel plot is extremely important. Plot meaning, basically, storytelling, to me. What draws me to comics is the storytelling potential of it, and if I wasn't interested in storytelling I'd probably be more likely to just do illustrations or drawings. So, I know we disagree on that point. Even so, I feel like you can't string a series of images together without telling some kind of a story. It's just a basic thing about cartooning. If you've got panels a story develops.

People rationalize the meaning in it.

But of course, I feel planning that at first is the most important thing.

Did you read the part in the Chris Ware interview (in Destroy All Comics #1), where he says he doesn't even really plan his stuff out ahead of time?

Yeah, I was actually kind of disappointed when I read that.

But, I think he's an exception, because I think his brain works at such a furious pace that he actually is planning it out, I just don't think he's planning it out on paper.

Yeah, you might be right...

From interviewing him I know that he's really meticulous about everything...

I feel that he must have some kind of a grand scheme of some sort when he's working on it. That's kind of how Chester works. He does things panel by panel, and whereas he doesn't plot out exactly what each panel is going to be, he does have a bigger picture of where it's going. Maybe Chris is doing that, he kind of knows where it's going, but doesn't know what's in the next panel. At least I hope so.

Do you write your stuff ahead of time.

Yeah, I do a pretty tight script.

Do you set up the shots? Do you describe the shots at all?

I do a rough breakdown for the whole issue, but it's very rough. Like I might very well change things around when I'm going, but I really like to know exactly what's going on on the page, and the next page. When I'm thinking compositionally, for telling the story

too, it's important for me how the pages fit with each other and how they balance each other, and of course, it's really important for me to figure out how I'm telling the story. So, it's important for me to take a shot and plan it out for the entire sequence so I can see how it flows, whether this is the right choice on how to tell it, stuff like that. I think it's very important to plot this stuff out.

It's weird to me that you actually compose each panel separately, too. That's something I wouldn't do.

It's very expedient. It's probably why I do it. The light table makes it easy, but it's really important for me that the composition be as simple as I can get it, yet still convey whatever information has to be conveyed. If I felt I could get away with it, I would throw out perspective entirely, but I don't feel like that kind of approach is really good for telling a story, unfortunately. I really like folk art, the way it's really flat. If I was to just do illustration, I would probably gravitate towards that approach, of removing perspective entirely. But, when you're telling a story, you find it's almost impossible to tell a story realistically if you don't have that level of perspective in the drawing. That kind of holds me to a more realistic approach.

Fionna, totally gets rid of everything.

Exactly, and I think that works, with when she says she doesn't think plot is important, but I think as soon as plot becomes more important, and you have to have a character walking from his apartment down to the train station, you really find that that kind of so called perspective, of reality, is a necessity. You can't convey the same feeling...maybe you could...maybe I just can't do it. I feel like it's really important for telling that kind of story.

It just depends on what kind of feelings your trying to convey.

Exactly.

If you want reality and human experience then those backgrounds and those buildings really help.

I find I can't break away from it.

I do it, not only because of that, but I like old strip artists so much, and I just respect the idea of having learned how to draw perspective flawlessly, like Roy Crane does, I just think that's such a valuable thing as a person, to know.

Well, if I could draw as well as Roy Crane, I would, but I just can't reach that level. I think you have to work within your limitations. I just don't ever draw that realistically.

How often do you draw?

Every day probably.

And how long?

It all depends. It really depends on what I'm working on. With





illustration and comics I'm probably drawing every single day. No, that's not true. I get some days to goof off, but if I have a lot of illustration work I might be drawing all day, or I might be drawing for just a couple of hours. When I'm working on the comic book, usually though, I'm drawing like a really long day. Like from about ten in the morning till about midnight. That's because it takes me a lot of work to get the comic done. It's really

pretty concentrated work, usually. With illustration, I can slack off a bit, and maybe only draw for a few hours a day.

Wow, that's amazing. That's a lot of time.

I feel it's really good for you, though. I'm amazed how after doing illustration for five years, it really improved my drawing ability. I found the working out of a pose for a character is effortless, compared to how much work I had to put into it five years ago. It really does start to become second nature, and you can approach much more difficult drawings a lot easier. I never thought I'd get to that point. It always seemed to be a struggle.

That's the thing about doing a newspaper strip that would be so great, that you have to do it every day...

Unless you're drawing Cathy, and then you just get worse. These modern strip cartoonists don't really have much in drawing ability anyway, so...

That's the thing, me personally...I feel like you have to push yourself to do that and to get the subtlety of a Fionna Smyth emotion kind of thing, combined with the really knowing how to draw, too. I think that's the future of comics.

I think once you can really draw, you can move off into any form of stylization you want, but you still have those technical abilities to fall back on. I think this is exactly the opposite of what modern fine artists are doing, once you have those skills you really can legitimately move in any direction, but you're held back, you're options are much limited when you don't have those skills, when you're drawing in a primitive style because that's the only style you can draw in. I think it never hurts to be able to draw well. If once you can draw well, you move into a style that doesn't display any drawing skill at all, well, that's fine. It's just a matter of having the option to chose, one way or the other.

I think so many painters I see around in the galleries and stuff, I look at it, and I can really tell that they can't draw any better. That this is the best they can do, and that's why they're doing it this way.

It's almost insulting to me, as a viewer, because it shows me that they don't really care about what they're doing. "Why do I want to look at this, you didn't put any effort into this at all."

I agree. I think art should be a struggle. You really should have to struggle to make it good. When I'm doing illustration work, I don't struggle with it. I do the simplest approach I can. I create a composition that's effective and simple and then I can get it done in a certain amount of time.

Do you usually illustrate articles? Is that the kind of stuff

you're doing?

Yeah, Yeah. Like editorial stuff. But when I'm working on the comic book I always make it a point that every single panel that I'm working on I try to do something more complicated than I would normally do. Because, I want it to be better. I want to push myself, and that's the only way your drawing really does get better, if you keep pushing yourself. If I was just doing illustration then I'd be a hack, but comics keeps my integrity and forces me to try to do my best work.

That's really cool.

I think you can only do that if you love something too, 'cause otherwise it's just a job, and in any job you want to goof off. You don't want to have to mop the floor if you can just stand there, unless you own the place and you love it.

Exactly. That's totally how I approach comics. I do things just to make myself learn how to do things. In comics I'll do the same shot over and over again just to make myself learn how to draw it.

It's important. I think probably, the medium in the last twenty or thirty years has had it's first group of artists who are really just doing it because they love it. It doesn't mean it's all good, but, it is good to have a group of artists involved in something that's just not a commercial venture.

That's the thing, comics have been this really weird beast that hasn't existed before. It's almost commercial, but then there's this creativity to it...

I think it's pretty exciting. Even if we never do develop a large audience, I really do feel like I'm involved with the very beginning of a really exciting art movement.

I hope so.

Yeah, if it lasts.

I think it will, because it seems like everybody just wants to do it, regardless of money.

I hope it will last. There's always the danger that it's a complete anachronism, like radio plays, or something. I mean, there are people out there who collect old radio shows, but there's no market. If you really want to do great radio plays, you might be able to do some, but there's hardly any audience, and I'm afraid that in forty years, that's what comics will be like. There will be like two-hundred people in North America who are sending their little copies to each other. It's sad that it could happen, but I'm really hoping it doesn't. I'm hoping it goes the other way, or at least stays like this.

I think it can't help but go, as long as there's people who really believe in it, and preach the virtues of it.

I hope so, I really do.

That's my mission.

I'm hoping it will grow too. I think we're in a stage now where people who would never have even done comics are considering it as an option. People who have a lot of talent, instead of ten years ago when only a few oddballs would be willing to do it, people who just loved comics. Now, you've probably got some people growing up who are about twenty years old, and might have a lot of talent, and they've seen some good comics, and they might think, "Why not go into comics," instead of thinking, "Why not go into illustration," or film making, or whatever. It's only when you start attracting greater artists, will the medium grow. I think that in a small way that's beginning.

That's really true. Another question about technique, do you letter with a brush?

Yeah, I do. I use one brush for everything. I like to use a number six.

Is that a Japanese influence at all?

No. I don't know how it started. I forced myself to learn how to use a brush six or seven years ago, and I just got really comfortable with using one brush for everything, like the same size. I

don't like to switch to other tools for things, so I just make it a point to ink everything I do with the same brush. I feel it gives a real continuity to the artwork, and with the lettering matching that way.

Is it really slow?

I've never gotten my skills down on using an Aimes lettering guide or anything.

Yup, I use one of those actually.

They're kind of alien to me. I've got one here, but I've never figured it out, so I just eyeball everything.

Yeah, it gives you a more natural feel. That's the one problem with the Aimes thing, it gives you this kind of...I don't know, I'm using it on the Crime Clinic comic I'm doing 'cause I want that fifties comic feel, but on other stuff I don't think it's really necessary.

Strangely, I didn't even notice until my third issue, that I was using upper and lower case, and that's not normal in comics. Chester pointed it out to me, and I realized I never noticed that everybody just uses capital letters. Actually, just the capital letters is nice. It's very readable, but now I'm real comfortable with using upper and lower case.

I think with you, it speaks of the gag influence, because those artist weren't into the same kind of formulas that comic artists are into.

Definitely not. The one thing those guys really excelled at was composition, and that's something that a lot of comic book artists didn't excel at. They were better at their sheer draftsmanship.

Have you seen Jack Coles art?

Sure.

To me, he's the best comic artist ever.

Yeah, he's great.

His composition really works for me, He's one of the few comic artist who actually understood composition.

Sure, he's got a good compositional sense. Eisner had good compositional sense too. I think the thing about comics that's kind of forgotten, I think about ten years ago, I saw, Frank Miller said some sort of a thing about the history of comics was the history of shit. That really offended me, because there really is a phenomenal amount of high quality stuff out there, and so much of it has been forgotten. So much of it deserves reprinting. Like where is that great collection of Barnaby, by Crockett Johnson.

There was some in the seventies...

Yeah, there was those Del Ray editions too that came out, but...that's great stuff. There's tons of great stuff out there, really forgotten stuff, and it's a shame there isn't a bigger audience for these old strips too.

I had this humongous argument with Jeff, about whether there was any good thing things done in comics in the past, and I think half of it is that people don't see it. I mean, Krazy Kat is going out of print, and that's just a crime.

It really is. I think too, you've got to look back at the stuff with a certain historical perspective. You can't expect that some of these artists, I mean, they were working in craft, and it may not stack up



against the great novelists or something, but it's still very interesting to look at. Somebody like Dan DeCarlo even, who was really a very skilled cartoonist. Those Archie stories, or the stuff he did at Marvel in the late fifties may not be great art, but it's certainly worth looking at to study a master cartoonist, showing his skills, and there were tons of these guys. Dick Spang was a really good cartoonist.

I got to meet him and talk to him for a little bit.

Oh, did you?

He was so nice. He's just the nicest guy.

I'd like to meet him. I love his stuff. You know who no one ever mentions as a great cartoonist is Raymond Briggs. Do you know him? When The Wind Blows?

I think I saw something by him...he's written a book on how to draw comics?

I don't know. He's a British guy. He does children's books, is what he's known as, although his children's books are always in comic strip form. He did the Snowman, he did When The Wind Blows, he did the Man. The Bear is his newest one.

He's still doing stuff now?

Oh yeah. He's an older guy, but you should go into a children's bookstore and ask for When The Wind Blows. This is one of the greatest comic narratives ever written. It's meant for adults, and it's about nuclear war. It's such an affecting piece, you'll cry at the end of it.

I've seen a book written by him on how to draw comics, but I didn't get it 'cause I wasn't familiar with him, and I didn't have enough money or whatever.

He's really one of the all time masters. You could put When The Wind Blows next to Maus as one of the great comics, and you never hear his name, just because he's out of the loop. He's over in the children's book world. That's part of the problem with the big picture, they don't look around.

I don't know, much to the chagrin of Chris Ware, I even see film as part of the big picture, and I see writing as part of the big picture, too.

Yes, you definitely can't just look at comics. That's too small of a world. You should hope that people doing comics are reading books and watching movies. That may sound like a strange thing for me to be saying since my current storyline is so much about comics, but I certainly don't intend to keep doing that.

What films and authors are you into?

My favorite authors, well, number one would be Salinger. I've always been a huge J.D. Salinger fan. Second on that list would be Alice Munro. She's a Canadian writer. She's in the New Yorker all the time...she's one of the most wonderful writers ever. Her work is so sensitive and so, I don't even know how to describe it, it's just wonderful stuff. It's really well written and really insightful. Raymond Carver would be up near the top. That would probably be three of my real favorites. I usually like books that are non-genre oriented.

I can see the Salinger influence on your work. I never thought of that before, in spite of the fact that you were reading Franny and Zooey...

Salinger is somebody I've loved since I was in my late teens, and I've read the stuff a thousand times. He's another one of these people, like when I was talking about Crumb I was saying, there's certain artists that you don't feel like they influenced you, so much as when you read it they confirmed your own thoughts. Salinger is definitely one, and Woody Allen would be the third of that group. I'm a huge Woody Allen fan.

Have you read a lot of his writing?

I've read all of his writing, and it's fun, I laugh, but it's his films that are his great works.

As far as film directors he's be your favorite?

Yeah, he'd be my favorite. I'd probably put Mike Leigh up there.



You're right. He's always got me going when I'm watching Mr. Deeds Goes to Town. I'm buying into it every time, even though I realize that his humanist philosophy isn't entirely practical, still at the end I'm feeling that "stick up for the little guy attitude." **That's funny, you also say about how Schulz sucks you in too.** There's this one part when you're talking about how some Peanuts are kind of trite, but it's true, those guys have a talent that comes through that, and even though I don't agree with everything they're saying, like Schulz was a pretty hardcore Christian for a while, I'm still sucked in.

I think when you're reading the work of a really talented person, a difference of opinion doesn't matter. I think the talent definitely pulls you through, and you find yourself being much more tolerant than if you were reading a more didactic work by somebody who

What did he do?

Did you see the film Naked? It just came out last year. I've heard about it. People have been telling me to see it. That was an absolutely brilliant film. That and his film...he's done quite a few, but a lot of them you'd never see, because he did a lot of them for the BBC in England, but Life is Sweet was another great film by him. But Naked is such a work of genius. He should be winning the Academy Award this year, not that Forest Gump.

Oh god...

But nobody will pay attention to it, because it's just not a blockbuster mentality. It was an incredible film. A work of genius.

Makes me want to go see it.

You can probably get it on video. Take a look for any of Mike Leighs films, 'cause any of them are worth watching. He did one called Abigail's Party that's really brilliant too.

Who else?

I really like Orson Wells, of course. And I love Frank Capra, although I realize...

Do you like Preston Sturges at all.

The thing is, everybody always asks me that when I say I like Capra, but I don't really know Preston Sturges stuff very well at all. I think I've seen like one film.

To me, he's even more poignant than Capra.

Well, Capra is pretty corny, but he always sucks me in.

is just preaching at you. That never sucks you in. I mean, I don't get sucked in to Ditko's philosophy. I might find it interesting that he's doing this crazy work, but not for one second is he sucking me in. He was probably sucking me in more when he was doing Spiderman or Dr. Strange. Any sort of Ayn Randian philosophy he was putting across in Spiderman would have got to me more than it would get to me through Mr. A.

Have you seen the new Dr. Strange reprint that they came out with?

Is it the hardback?

Yeah.

I thought it was really shitty looking.

Seriously, I took out the colors and compared them, and they're actually really good colors.

Oh yeah. Is this on the glossy paper? The Marvel Masterworks? Yeah, I don't like the glossy paper either, but the colorist was actually aware of what was going on in the work. I hate all the other ones though. The Incredible Hulk one is like garbage to me to look at, because I know what it really looks like.

When I looked at the Dr. Strange one, I just thought, I'll keep my little paperback, the one I have from the seventies. I just didn't really like the production values on it.

It gets to me.

I do love that Ditko Dr. Strange stuff. Great stuff. Really beautifully drawn.

It's funny, because looking back on it, out of all the work that was done at Marvel, that's the only stuff that still stands up. Except the Kirby. Everything by Kirby stands up to me. There's no period, except maybe the very last years of his life, like Captain Victory of something, that I don't like.

OMAC doesn't stand up. Did you read OMAC?

Well, I don't like the strips. I'm not a fan of OMAC, or the New Gods, but I still think the drawing is phenomenal.

Yeah, that's true. The problem with the Kirby early Marvel stuff is it has that stupid dialog on it.

Well yeah, the stories don't read well.

I don't even read the dialog anymore. I've decided it completely doesn't exist to me.

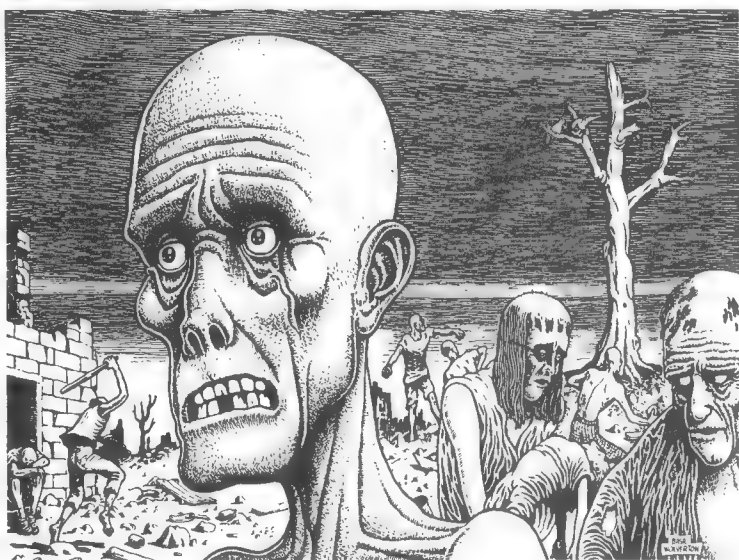
I find his monster stuff real readable though. That stuff is so stupid, but it's fun. I can read endless amounts of that monster stuff. **In my opinion, that's where Ditko hit his peak.**

Yeah, he did great stuff there too, and some of the stories are actually not that bad. I read a few of them as a kid, that I remember actually frightened me. It's hard to believe now, when you look at them. The stories who frightened me more than anybody as a kid were Wolverton's horror stories, and the science fiction stuff that he did. They really freaked me out. There was something definitely creepy under the surface there, more so than the E.C. stuff that I read. I remember his stories of people turning into crabs, or those brain bats taking them over. There was something scary about this transformation that almost always went on in his stories, this loss of personal identity. They really did it to me as a kid. They kind of freaked me out.

The idea of Wolverton's stories really scared me too, actually, as a kid, his humor stuff scared me. His people, like the Mad drawings of ugly women, it's all just really bizarre. And it's so funny...the more I find out about him, he was just a jolly guy. He didn't realize how scary... Did you see the New Testament stuff he did?

Yeah, actually I owned it all for a while, then I was foolish enough to get rid of it. I tried to get it back two years ago, then it was too late. I sent away for it years ago and got it all. At some point I was stupid and I thought, "Oh, I don't want this," and I got rid of it, and I've been kicking myself ever since. It's interesting to see how he could control himself and try to keep it to a low key.

The Revelation stuff is really frightening, though.



from Basil Wolverton's *The Story of Man*

That stuff he's pulling out all the stops. The funny thing about Wolverton is, in a lot of ways I think Wolverton was a naive artist. **Really?**

I think he had a lot of skill, but I think his approach was very similar to a lot of folk artists. The fact that he didn't realize how grotesque the work was, and how affecting it was is really similar to a lot of naive artists. Also there's a real obsessive quality to his work. That hatching style is really similar to folk artists will put every leaf on a tree or every single rivet on a train. It's kind of an overkill approach, which is an attempt to do something realistic, and yet it achieves the exact opposite effect. I think, just reading the way Wolverton talks about things that he had a very simplistic approach to what he was doing, unlike a more intellectual artist like Kurtzman, or something.

I really want to think of Wolverton as a total genius...a conscious genius.

I don't see him that way at all.

I think you're right, I just have so much respect for it, that I..., but you're right, I don't think he was aware of it.

So many of these guys, I don't think, thought of what they were doing in any higher sense.

Jack Cole just thought his comic stuff was just crap, and he didn't care about it at all.

He's a sad story.

And how. Have you seen his gag cartoons?

Yeah, I have. They're gorgeous. Man, he could control the watercolors. They were beautifully done.

He was one of those complete guys to me, who just did it all.

Yeah, he definitely was a real master when it came to cartooning.

A problem I have, now that I'm becoming more involved with criticizing comics, I don't know how to criticize these people that I'm friends with and I really respect, but who I don't think are performing to a certain level. How do you feel about criticism?

Well, I think it's always worthwhile to criticize people who are doing good work. I think the danger is when you start criticizing people who aren't doing very good work, because then there's nothing constructive to say. Like, I can say I really like Dan Clowes work, but I think he's got more potential than he's using. I think when he did that first episode of *Ghost World*, I thought that was a real creative jump in maturity of his storytelling, but then when I see him doing something like *The Happy Fisherman*, it's just a waste of his talent. He's just fucking around with goofy stuff, trying to please his audience.

Don't you think he has a weird, kinda sick, fascination with that humor, though?

Definitely, but I don't think it's his strong point. I think maybe it's funny, I thought *Shamrock Squid* was hilarious, but in a way I think it's a waste of his abilities. I feel like in many ways, Dan is loaded with talent, but *Eightball* is kind of a catch all to please everyone. You've got some humor stuff...

Have you talked to him about that?

No. I don't know him very well. I've corresponded with him once or twice, but I'd be more than willing to tell him. Because of the fact that I think he's so talented, I feel like I can criticize him, but if he was just some guy working at Marvel who showed me some really crappy stuff he did, I'd probably just say, "Oh, that's fine," because what's the point of criticizing him. It doesn't make any difference. Like when Joe shows me something and I don't think it's any good, I'll tell him so, 'cause I think he can do better. I think that story Dan did, *Glue Destiny*, left an inkling in there of a real new approach for him. Same with that *Blue Italian Shit*...the one with the guy telling about his experiences as a punk.

Yeah, I remember that, but the story didn't stick in my mind. I think there's like a maturity of approach there, that's a little different from his other stuff. I sometimes feel like Dan's trying to be too cool, and I don't like to see cartoonists trying to be cool. I think there's certain things going on in cartooning right now, and one of them is this desire to be hip, because comics are supposedly hip right now, and I think that's a real mistake for any artist to be trying to be hip, and drawing cute trendy girls, I think is like...

The thing is there's a lot of kids like that around here, and I think, having lived in Berkeley, I can understand where that Ghost World story is coming from. That's a side of humanity. It's perfectly valid to write or draw about anything, but it's just a little too timely for my tastes. I was much more

pleased with the first episode of Ghost World. I almost wish he hadn't carried it on. It's becoming episodic stories, which I think is the downfall of comics to begin with. This idea of setting on characters, and then you just keep telling stories about them.

What about Washtubs?

I think, to a degree, that's always been a fault with cartooning. I don't think you should set up characters and carry them on for years and years and years. When you read Catcher in the Rye, when you get to the end you might wish there were more Holden Caulfield, but if there were, that would ruin the story. A story should have a beginning, a middle, and an end.

Washtubs is like that for me.

But it's not, though, because it's not a beginning, a middle, and an end. In a novel you have to know where it's going to end. If Peter Bagge ends the Buddy Bradley story tomorrow, it wasn't a novel, it was a bunch of episodes. I think that's something cartoonists fall into, because if a character is popular, you just keep doing more of it, but I think things should end. If comics are going to move forward they've got to be like movies and novels. In everything else, if you're telling a story, there needs to be a point, and because of that, you have to be concise. You have to be something that does have a definite beginning, middle, and end. I don't know...I think those old guys managed to pull it off without doing that. You disagree?

I don't think they pull it off.

Okay.

I can't think of any continuing comic, right now, that I really think pulls it off, for a greater purpose.

Well, you're doing a continuing story...

But this is like a book. Six issues is one story. If I didn't have to do it in episodes I wouldn't. What I mean, it's not continuing stories that's the problem. For example, Velvet Glove is one story, even though it was over eleven issues, or whatever, I don't feel that Ghost World is like that. Maybe I'm wrong, but I'm really starting to feel that these are episodes, not building towards a greater theme. I could be wrong, he could pull it around and surprise me, but that's definitely not what's going on in Hate. Hate is definitely becoming like the Simpsons, where you have a group of characters that you create stories for, and I think that's a big mistake.

Actually, yeah, I totally gave up on Hate. I was a humongous Neat Stuff fan, but...

I think Neat Stuff was a superior product, but, I still think Peter Bagge could do better work. I think he's latched himself on to Buddy Bradley as his meal ticket, and I think it's a mistake.

Yeah.

Like Palestine is my example of a great piece of comic work. There's something that's concise and meaningful, and it's got an

end, a middle, and it says something.

You know, I was talking to Jeff about that. I read the entire book, I didn't read them as they were coming out. Jeff said that it lost something because of the format that it was coming out in. I think that's a really valid point, that when something is forced to come out in these chapters that come out over a

period of months, like I think your whole It's A Good Life story, even though I love it as it is, but I think it will be even better once I can sit down and read it all together.

That's how I'm planning it. My end goal is the collection, more than the issues.

You're doing a collection of it?

For sure.

With extra pages?

No, but at the end there will be all the Kalo cartoons I've discovered, but I can't tell you how many, because that would spoil the story.

That's my point, is it because Drawn & Quarterly saying it should come out in a serialized form?

I think it's just because of the basic nature of comics. You can't support yourself working two to three years to finish one story and then just publish it all at once. You've got to have a comic book. First of all, you've got to build reader interest too. If I had just started drawing it last year, and then finished it next year, and then put it out, nobody would even know who I am. You build name identification by building your own series, which means people are more likely to buy the collection. And you've got to have that money by serializing it first, and then getting the extra money when you collect it. It's the only financial way that's logical.

It's frustrating because books aren't like that. Book publishers will give you an advance to do your book. Actually that is Jeff's big rant for this week is that comics should come out like books. I guess there's not the market for it yet. That's the problem. I think if the market could support it, it could happen, but at this point, there's no publisher who could give you twenty thousand dollars to live two years on so that you could turn out a graphic novel.

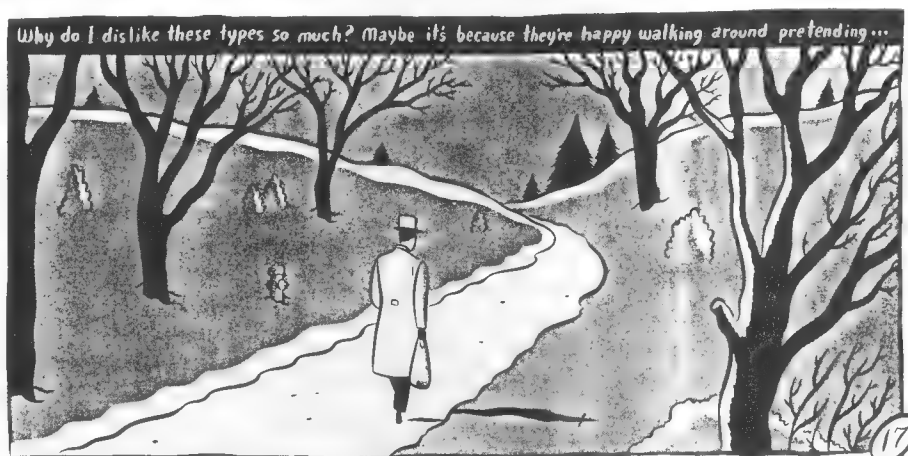
Those silly Batman artists make more than that in a year.

I know. They can clean up unbelievably. I heard about one inker in Montreal, who inked one issue of Superman that sold well, and he made eighty thousand dollars for that one issue.

Jesus Christ!

When I heard that Todd McFarlane made a million dollars on that first issue of Spawn, I felt sick. It's such an injustice.

There's a lot of directors who that same kind of thing would



happen to. These great directors, like Orson Wells, it's a total tragedy.

It's heartbreaking, but that's just it, if you're making too much money, you must be doing something wrong. Somebody once said, that no work of art that is great is ever commercial, and I think that's true. Even though, that doesn't mean it couldn't make a lot of money, but it's never intended. Nobody ever sits down with the intention of making a lot of money, and then turns out a great piece of art. You have to go the other way.

What's the circulation of Palooka-Ville?

Right now it's hovering close to five thousand.

Wow! Last time I heard it was around three thousand.

Yeah, it's moved up. The last couple of issues alone, it's got about a five hundred reader increase each time, I think. So I was pretty happy with that. It's still not quite at five thousand, but it's getting close.

Do you think it's the ongoing story, or do you think it's just that people are finding out about it, or something like that?

From the mail I'm getting, I'm guessing that it has a lot to do with the new story. I'm getting a lot more positive response. I think some of it has to do with that the frequency of schedule is better now. I had that really big gap in between issues two and three, where a year went by, and since then it's been really strong in my mind to make sure I could get three issues out in a year, so I'm going to try to stick to that. I really do think it helps.

It's easier to remember what's going on in the story.

I think frequency is important, of course if you were getting it out bi-monthly, you'd sell even better, but there's only so much you can do.

Is that one of your goals, to become a full-time cartoonist?

Would you want to do it bi-monthly? If you could pay your bills?

Even if I could afford it, I don't think I could ever get it out that fast. But, I would love to be a full-time cartoonist, and get it out four times a year, instead of three.

Dan Clowes seems to make a living, so it is possible.

I think it's possible, especially if you can get up higher in the sales figures. I think Dan is definitely selling over ten thousand.

Oh yeah, I thought he has up to twenty-five thousand.

Last I heard was seventeen, but if he's selling twenty-five thousand he's laughing. That's good. That's really good! I bet he and Peter probably have the best sales at the moment.

(joking) Except for all those Vertigo books.

Except for all the crap.

Actually, I've heard that Ed Brubaker is going to be writing for Vertigo now.

Oh really? I don't think that's a great move for him.

Oh, I think it pays the bills. I think that's why he's doing it. I think there's a danger of for working for those companies. I think they suck you in.

Have you ever seen the Pleece Brothers? Warren Pleece, the British guys, I forget the other guy...

I've heard the name.

They did something for Vertigo, and I read it 'cause I'd really like their self published stuff, and I couldn't believe how bad the story was. It was alienating. They had one of the Vertigo characters appear in it, and it was like, "Why is this fictional character in this story that might be interesting?"

Exactly. Once you start dealing with that corporate structure you've got to bend to what they want. I just think getting involved with Marvel, DC or even Image is a big mistake.

Unless you want to make millions of dollars.

Well, if you want to make money it's a good choice, but if you want to keep any kind of artistic freedom it's not.

Do you ever do signings or stuff like that?

Yeah, I do signings. Usually Chester Brown, Joe Matt and I end up doing signings as a group, the three of us, because we're so close together. Whenever somebody calls about something we all go. We've done a fair amount of signings.

In New York?

Yeah, New York. We went to Albany and Ann Arbor, you know, places that are relatively close. Here in Toronto we sign at the Beguiling, it seems like at least once a year. I hate signings actually.

Just because it's such an awkward situation, or what?

Exactly. I think I'm a fairly social person, but I'm basically anti-social, so I always end up having a really bad headache afterwards because both Joe and Chester are pretty quiet, so it's up to me to talk to everybody, and then I just feel like shit later, because I don't like having small talk with people I don't know.

As somebody who likes cartoonists, it's always frustrating, when they come to town, a lot of people go to the Hernandez Bros. and stuff, and I want to meet them, but in that kind of situation, I don't feel like meeting them at all, 'cause it's exactly that, small talk, and I'm not good at it at all.

I don't even go to signings if somebody is in town now, because that's just no way to meet anybody. The only way you can meet somebody is to have a nice one on one conversation with them. **I feel obligated when it's some old cartoonist. Like Jack Kirby, I had to go.**

Sure. I wish I'd met Jack Kirby.

I actually got to hang out behind the back counter at Comic Relief where I was working, and talk to him a little bit.

That must have been nice.

And I had a chance to go out to dinner with him, which I blew, and I'm going to be regretting for the rest of my life. It was a couple of months before he died.

It's kind of sad. It's hard to connect with people, even if you want to. Especially with some of these older guys. I remember Will Eisner came through town a few years ago, and there's just no way of really connecting, really having a real conversation, but you really can't do anything about it. You can't force some kind of intimate conversation that's never going to happen.

What old comic book artists do you like?

I like Kirby, of course, and Ditko, C.C. Beck, Sheldon Mayer, John Stanley would be like tops of the list, John Stanley is one of my absolute favorites, the usuals I guess, like Dick Sprang, and Wolverton, H.G. Peters, do you know his stuff?

Oh man, yeah, I love his stuff. That's the great thing about working in a comic book store, I get to see all those originals, because those Wonder Womans haven't been reprinted.



Definitely. All I have is that one Wonder Woman hardback.

I wish I had the money.

I had to pay plenty to get it out of Joe (laughter). I like Dan DeCarlo a lot, and Kurtzman, the usuals I guess.

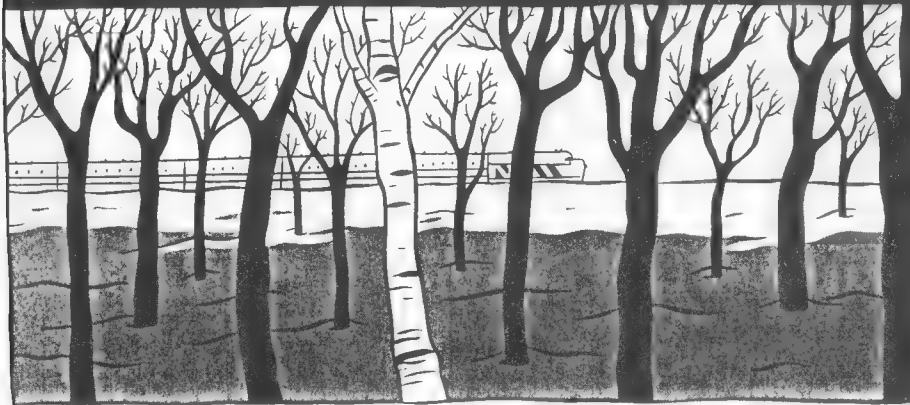
All the Mad guys...

Well, I like the Mad guys, I like Will Elder a lot. Probably nobody too obscure or anything.

Do you like animation at all?

Not much beyond the thirties. I'm a big fan of the Fliesher stuff, and I'm a big fan of the early Disney stuff, like the black and white Mickey Mouse stuff, and the Silly Symphonies. Any really early animation I like.

The thing is... you never know what tiny event might become a potent memory--lingering in your mind, taking on more and more significance with each passing year.



When you're walking around, you give the impression in Palooka-Ville that you relate to a lot of things through comics, but do you really...that Tin Tin thing in the new one with the train, that's happened to me before from that same book, so that really struck me.

That's pretty true. I think I'm so immersed in cartooning that there's a million different reference points that are constantly causing associations. There's always something coming up. I could be eating something, and for some reason it sparks the memory of some old gag cartoon. I feel that in some ways, my life philosophy have been formed by specific cartoons or strips that really spoke to me in some way. In an issue or so of Palooka-Ville, I mention a gag cartoon and a strip that I really feel represent my whole approach to the world. That at some point or another they kind of became like personal totems or something. I feel a real connection to cartooning that kind of transcends just an interest in it. It's almost superstitious or something, where you're constantly thinking about it.

What do you think cartoonists should do to make sure the medium doesn't end up like old radio shows? Or is there anything they can do?

This is a tricky question. I think the best thing cartoonists can do would be to start approaching their work with a real seriousness of intent. With an artists concern. I think for a long time cartoonists have approached things from the point of an entertainer, even the alternative and underground cartoonists have had a real anti-art stance. They would rather call themselves pornographers than artists, or writers, or whatever term you want to use. I think if comics are going to have a long lasting staying power, beyond some sort of a youth audience, they've really got to produce some enduring work. I think that comes from a maturity of approach, where you really do aim to tell something with a serious intent. Something that's more complicated than just getting a laugh out of the audience. I'm not saying that they shouldn't be funny, but not just get a laugh, or doing some cheap fart joke, or just being weird or hip for it's own sake. I'd like to see in ten or twenty years a body of work of cartoonists that really were trying

to produce comic novels, that really had some sort of staying power and could speak to a generation that's older than twenty years old. I think maybe that would produce some hope for the comics medium.

Do you think there's an audience out there for that kind of stuff?

I think there could be. I see things grow by word of mouth slowly, and I think that's the only way it's going to happen. I don't think it's going to happen by articles in Rolling Stone saying comics are hip or anything. When I get letters from people it's often like, "A friend of mine showed me your comic, and I don't read any comics, but I really like this one, and I'm going to keep reading it," or whatever...

The Love and Rockets syndrome.

That's the way an audience will grow, beyond just people who read Marvel comics as a kid, or people who are reading them because they're hip at the moment, and stop later. I think you need to have a literate audience that actually likes to read. And it doesn't have to be a huge audience to keep comics alive. In America, I think hardcover novels only sell about eight thousand copies. That's pretty bad, but that's enough to keep them alive. Of course, softcover novels sell a hell of a lot more. I think we have to have something like Maus. It had a hook that brought in the regular public. It was about the holocaust, but they could read it and they could enjoy it. They might not have read it if it was about Art

Spiegelman's relationship problems but if an audience could read something like that then they could read Chester's latest book, I Never Liked You. That has a wider appeal than just the trendy culture of people in their twenties. It actually does speak to just the basic human condition. I think the more cartoonists produce works that are generally from the heart...Jim Woodring's work is another example. I don't think you need to be twenty to read that. Maybe you're not going to enjoy it if you're fifty years old, I don't know, but maybe you are. I think the more mature work that is produced and the more it's collected, and the more of a large base of this kind of work is out there, the better chance we have of building a larger audience. Where they can come in and they can buy Maus and then, if they like it, maybe they buy one of Chester's books, you know. Then there's enough stuff to actually keep an interested reading audience. Hopefully a number of good cartoonists will grow over the years to fill that need. That's my only hope for it. I don't think any marketing scheme is going to pull us out. I really don't think things like the hippest cartoonist in the world kind of promo are really going to do anything. Anything where they're trying to align comics with youth culture, I think is a mistake. I don't want to be part of youth culture! Rock and Roll is youth culture, and that means you've got to keep it at a level that seventeen year olds can appreciate. I'd rather be in with the jazz crowd. It should be something...

Actually jazz is having a humongous comeback right now.

I can believe it. But it's not real jazz.

It's frightening to me, 'cause I've been a jazz fan since I was a kid, and it's strange that there's all these people now who are into Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie and all those people.

I look at it like this, I don't care if some idiots buy my book, as long as some intelligent people buy it too. If the idiots keep you going, more power to them. If they're buying Charlie Parker, they're helping to support good music. I often wonder when people are buying things, if I'm in some real hipsters apartment and they've got a Chet Baker CD, I'm wondering if they have it cause they like Chet Bakers music, or because they think it's real cool to be a heroin addict. I always wonder about people's motives when

things are hip. I think, Jazz having a hip resurgence, is just like comics having a hip resurgence, it only lasts as long as it's hip, and if it ceases to be hip you're in trouble. Look what happened to the underground comics when the counter-culture dissolved.

Yeah.

I don't want to be around when the slacker culture dissolves and suddenly you got no sales. So I kinda hope my work doesn't appeal to people on that level.

I don't think your work is on that level.

I hope not (laughs). I seem to get a lot of letters from people who don't seem to be part of that culture, so that's good. I mean, I've got no problems with it. If you want to buy my comics and you're wearing a touque and you've got dreadlocks that's fine with me, but I don't really target market it towards them, or anything.

What do you think about the future of small press comics?

I pretty much look at the small press, I don't know if this is insulting to the small press or not, as the training ground before you move into the alternative press. I can't see any logical reason why you would stay self-publishing if you had a choice, unless you're self-publishing in a better format. I can't really get into that whole philosophy of the do it yourself thing. It's kind of like the punk thing, where anybody can play an instrument. I think that's only valid to a certain point. I get good mini-comics that come through, and I think, "This is great. In a few years this person might be doing a really good comic." But I look at it as, this is where they can learn and grow before they're seriously published. Like when I see something by Adrian Tomine or Ariel Bordeaux, or things like that, I think these are pretty good.

Have you seen King-Cat?

No, I haven't actually. I usually rely on people sending me stuff. If they don't send it to me, I don't see it, usually.

He's a genius. He's one of the saviors of small press of real quality.

Do you have a different opinion of small press?

My opinion differs wildly. I just got into this humongous argument with Carol Swain, through a letter, and it's basically, I think the whole thing is art. The format of the book, where it goes to sell, is art, to me. The whole idea of it is art. When you're working with this format that Will Eisner, or whoever, established fifty years ago, it's just a product. It's like what happened if the pages on Eightball were whited out and something else slapped on on top of it. The package itself isn't really art. It's a format that people are used to getting their stuff in.

I think I see what you mean. You're saying that real comics are a commercial commodity, and mini-comics represent a pure desire to do comics.

Exactly.

I don't think I can agree with you on that though. I think the only difference is format. Especially when you're talking alternative comics, because I don't feel like any body in the alternative market is doing it for the money, like in Marvel and DC. I look at it as a difference in professionalism though. I think there may be people in mini-comics that are as good or better, than people working in published comics, so it's not a matter of if you have a real comic then you're better than somebody who is xeroxing, I don't think that at all, because there's a lot of crap published in the alternative press, but I tend to think, that if you're that good, you might as well move into a larger form of distribution which comes through real publishing (these are all kind of nebulous terms, like real publishing and self-publishing), but it's not the format. It's certainly not the size of the comic, I think it's the fact that when you're self publishing with a xerox machine, your audience is more limited. It doesn't mean that if you can round up the money and then publish it that means it's better. It might still be just junk, or if you were a genius it would still be genius. But I think it's the

difference between xeroxing up some short stories and having a novel published. There's a much larger audience you're more likely to reach, and chances are, if you're being published, there's some level of professionalism involved, not necessarily a level of artistic merit. So I tend to think of any one who is really good working in mini-comics, that the next step is to move to the larger audience.

I think people at Drawn and Quarterly are really lucky. But almost everything else I look at, maybe Fantagraphics is finally now, with Acme, learning to finally package it exactly how the artist wants to package it, but that's the thing that bugs me. You guys all have these really quality books, and it looks like you had some input on it basically. Chris Oliveros seems to be a really nice guy.

He is. It's a dream company. We are really lucky.

And that's my problem with the Fantagraphics and, it just seems to me like an extension of DC and Marvel and this whole thing.

Why? Because you think the publisher is in a superior position?

Yeah.

Well, I think you're right.

"Welcome to the real world."

Yeah.

I think maybe now, with Chris Ware...that the stupid shelf rack kind of format is just wrong.

I have a feeling that that's not going to happen. With any kind of publishing there's a certain kind of standardization rule that really holds, just like with books. You don't see too many novels that are ten inches tall, or fourteen inches tall, because of the simple fact that you have to sell through distribution channels, and I think that keeps things within limits of experimentation. Just like I feel like, you might look at...who is a favorite author of yours?

Raymond Chandler.

Okay, Chandler for example. He would have had to deal with the same system of publishers and editors, etc., that people at Fantagraphics have to deal with. Especially in any kind of publishing situation, I think there is a real sort of give and take between publisher and artist, unless of course you're self-publishing. Self-publishing is just as valid if you can manage to get it together. Black Eye press is actually a small publisher that is doing a pretty nice job of production values, the people who do Pickle.

I don't know...

I'm not crazy about everything they publish, but for an artist publisher relationship I think it's very easy going there too. I'm not crazy about several of those books, but...

There seems to be a real interest in quality work, in companies now, and the work itself is really quality, but it seems like the last frontier. It's the things that separates us from grandness in art. No matter what, the publishers taint is still there, except for maybe Chris Oliveros, but for most of the other people the publishers taint is still there.

I just can't be that purist about it. I tend to look at it, is there anyone in the mini-press, besides Steve Willis, who when they're given their choice to reach to reach the larger audience through the alternative press or whatever, would say no. Isn't it a logical step to move from the small press to the alternative press?

I think it has been. That's the thing. It's this accepted thing. Would you like to buck that system and head in another direction?

Ideally, yeah...

Then how would you do it?

I know it's not financially possible, that's the thing. And I'm trying, even though I have two books coming out from publishers where they've given me a chance to do it, one of them I'm doing completely my own way, and the other one,



a one page Little Lulu, by John Stanley, one of Seth's "absolute favorites."

I'm doing as a crime comic, because that's how crime comics look.

But is that your choice?

Yeah, both of those are completely my choice, and if they started saying things like we're going to have to put this ad in the back, unless it was for something I endorsed, I would start disagreeing with it, and I would be tempted to go someplace else.

But there you go, you still do have the power. You always have the power to say no.

I think that's a new thing.

Oh, of course the comic book industry is a history of a crime and abuse against any kind of artist, but I don't think that damns the whole publisher/artist relationship. I do believe, especially working with Chris, that you can have an equal position, in fact, I feel like I get more out of it than Chris does. When I got my first comic book contract from him, I couldn't believe it. There was like three lines, and it said, "You get this, you get this, and you get this," and I was like, "What do you get?" It's gotten a little bit more complicated since then, but basically I think it always depends on the individuals. There will always be sleazeball publishers. Even if you're selling mini-comics, there could be some guy who owns the store who completely rips you off for what you leave there. You go in and say, "Didn't I leave ten copies here," and he says, "Nope. There were only five, and none of them sold."

That's happened to me.

And I think that's the basic thing about dealing with people.

The thing I was talking about with going through all these other publishers, is that in spite of all that, I'm still going to do a mini-comic.

I can understand that. I've done some mini-comics, even after being published. I still think the mini-comic format is fun, and I don't think it's an invalid format because it's self-published or xeroxed. I just do really tend to just think of it as a matter of audience, and production values. If you can get just as good production values out of a xerox machine, for example, that you can get out of real printing, then there wouldn't be any reason why anyone would print at a certain point. I could see a point coming where you couldn't really tell the difference, and at that point it does become moot, as to which is the legitimate publishing method. Especially because of my love of old things, I am attracted to the comic book format itself.

I am too. That's my frustration. I have these two sides. Part of me wants to be this crazy artist type, and part of me loves the way comics used to look, and...

Sure. I've always wanted publish a comic in that off register dot process. When I look at those old Little Lulu's with that really flat color laid over that simple artwork, it's so appealing. And then of course there's the other direction, you've got all these production values now, you could do an incredibly beautiful water, well, not water color as in painting the whole thing, but I'd still do black lines. I don't like painted comic books. Those John J. Muth...

What do you think about Matotti though?

I like Fires. I think he's good, and I think it's perfectly legitimate, but I think the thing was, it's because he's a good cartoonists. Whereas, I feel, almost all the painted comics I've seen are produced by illustrators, who don't have any storytelling skills.

Yup.

And if they had great storytelling skills, maybe it would work, but I haven't seen one yet that does.

I'm a big hater of John J. Muth.

Yeah, me too. And I really hate that Marvels thing. I opened that up expecting it to be some incredible thing, the way people are talking about the artwork, and I just thought it was kind of half-assed looking.

What got me was the characters, and the way they were rep-

resented, like "Oh, I remember these guys," and I tried to read it, but after looking at that art for like five minutes, I was just like, "Ugh."

After seeing the Harvey Awards last year, that that thing cleaned up...

Oh really?

Yeah, it won almost everything. I will no longer be voting in the Harveys anymore. Those awards have just gone down the toilet. They don't represent anything anymore, if that thing can win, and you're not giving any awards for like, Chester Brown or Peter Bagge, any of the bigger cartoonists who are at least producing valid work, then forget it. That's just another crappy award. It always happens. They set up an award, then it just devolves after like four years, into something that just votes Stan Lee into the Hall of Fame again. I'm so sick of that.

Anyway, I think too much of the pseudo-realistic painting style is totally inappropriate to cartooning, because it slows down the natural movement between panels and turns it into series of stills, like fumetti. Fumetti never worked, why should we turn cartooning into it.

I think Fires shows the potential, though.

Certainly I agree that any technique could be used, but I seriously do think that if you were going to paint a comic in a photo-realist style, you'd need to be a genius to pull it off. It's just like if you were going to do a comic with a series of photographs...there's something about that still quality that comes from too much realism that slows down that natural progression between panels, and it ends up looking like a bunch of film stills.

Have you ever thought about adapting books into comics, and what do you think about that?

I've thought about it. I suppose it could be successful. It depends, it's kind of like adapting books into movies. Occasionally someone will do a great movie out of a book, but I guess it all depends on the individual too. You'd have to be a pretty good artist, if it's a great book, to do anything with it. I think things belong in their own medium. I think, probably the best movies were written for the movies, and the best books should probably remain books, but there's certainly no rules. But who knows, maybe somebody out there could do a great adaptation of some book and it would be brilliant. I probably wouldn't do it. Maybe a short story would be a better subject. To really do a novel justice it would have to be like 600 pages. They're just totally different mediums. I don't think the strengths of writing are the strengths of comics, just like the strengths of film are not the strengths of comics. They all have different things of what subject matter they're best suited too, and it's not superheros in comics. I've heard a lot of people say that comics are best suited to superheros, because it's the most believable medium for them, and that may be true, but I certainly don't think that's what comics should be all about. I think they're suited to an awful lot of different things, but we need to explore further to see how well comics handle different types of narratives.

I think the potential is so unlimited.

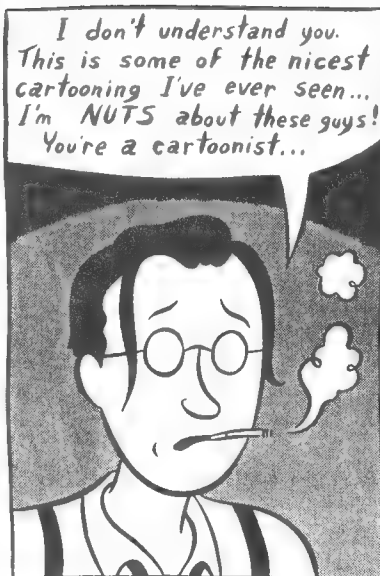
I agree.

There's everything, you can just do so much.

In a way we're lucky that comics were delegated to a children's medium for all these years, because it's left a real opening up of it as an artistic medium until we were around. Otherwise, if comics had started to expand along with film, we'd have a much harder time getting in. What's exciting about comics is that it's a small field, and you don't know who is going to be the geniuses and who is going to be awful. It's so small that you really have a chance to do it.

But what's always daunting to me is the drawing ability of the guys in the past.

Well, sure. The further you go back, I really believe, the better



It's pretty autobiographical. I tend to think of autobiographical comics as meaning that they're true, but it doesn't mean that it's some kind of factual account though. I will regularly change events around, if it makes the story better. I would say, the first issue of my comic was 100% true, and the second and third were 90% true, and working up from there the level of truth has certainly dropped. It's true, that anything I'm thinking reflects my actual

the draftsmanship ability is. If you take a look at Punch cartoons from 1900 or 1910, you see a level of draftsmanship that no one of the planet right now is capable of. Because nobody is trained in that way any longer or has that sort of discipline to really learn how to draw like that. All us comics artists are basically are self-taught, and we reach a certain level where a certain competence sets in, but there's a level of draftsmanship that has disappeared from the world, and I think it has a lot to do with the progression of modern art and modern taste.

The school system too. I read about the old guys taking classes in New York in the thirties and stuff, and it sounds like they were so rigorous, they made them learn so much. I have a book written by a teacher from around the turn of the century, on art, and it's so intense.

I know. These older guys definitely had a much firmer grounding in a real understanding of how to draw, than is really going on anywhere right now. If you look around at comic books you'll see some people who really can draw very well, somebody like Dan Clowes or Chris Ware, with a real technical ability, but then there is lots of people who are doing well, who really don't have that much drawing ability at all. People who, if we were back at the turn of the century wouldn't be able to get a job sweeping the floor at one of these magazines. I think maybe it had something to do with the apprenticeship system even, of apprenticing under a really good artist first.

Do you feel obligated to try to learn that level of draftsmanship?

I feel obligated to push myself to draw better and better all the time. I don't know if I have that much skill.

To aspire to it at least.

I'm certainly aspiring to always get better, but I don't think I have any illusions that I'll ever be able to draw with that kind of perfection of draftsmanship. I think Crumb, pushes himself really. He really is an amazing draftsman. And there are a few, you can name a few people who really are incredibly skillful. I think since the advent of the camera the desire to be able to draw that realistically, that's not photo-realistically, has really declined. Even somebody as cornball as Norman Rockwell, had an incredible draftsman ability.

I really love him actually.

I think that he's great, but I think that his subject matter is real middlebrow stuff, but I look around the world of illustration know, but I don't see any one who really represents that level of craft.

How autobiographical is your comic?

thoughts, but who the hell knows what I was thinking that day, I was walking around after meeting Ruthie, or whatever.

Is she actually your girlfriend?

She's not the girlfriend I have now. She's more of a composite of people I once knew, but the events depicted are pretty true. This series is much more of a composite of different events. Everything in it is probably 80% true, they're shuffled around in time, or whatever makes the story work best dramatically. I think probably most people who are writing autobiography are doing that.

Changing stuff around...

Like, say, Chester's recent storyline, I'm sure everything in there has happened, but maybe not in that order, or in that level of importance, or whatever.



It's funny, Adrian Tomine manages to make his stuff seem autobiographical, even though it's not...

Yeah, same with Lynda Barry. She always felt that way, but of course she was making it all up.

I haven't seen much of her stuff.

I used to be a huge fan of Lynda Barry, and when I was first developing an interest in autobiography, it was Lynda Barry more than anyone, that made me think it was the thing that was the truest, for the best writing. Then later, I found out it was fiction.

That's great. You said that after you finish the story you're working on right now, you're going to be doing a fiction story, and I was wondering, what's it going to be about?
I've got an awful lot of stories planned out. For example, I was planning out this cartoonist story even before I started Palooka-Ville. It's just that it was a much different story, back then, in my mind.

Were you planning it out in your head or on paper?

In my head. That's how I always do it. I just keep it in my head, then, as the years go by, I find, things naturally get better, 'cause they start to recombine with other ideas. When I first planned this cartoonist story it was nothing like it came out. It was really much more boring.

The fiction I want to do is the kind of fiction you can't put a label on, because it's just stories about life. I guess, if you want to call it slice of life...I don't really like that term, because that tends to mean nothing of importance happens. I don't want to do any genre fiction. For example, I think the next story I'm doing will probably revolve around the life of an old woman in her house. That's the best synopsis I can give of it. Nothings going to happen that makes it a dramatic event.

Is she going to feed the birds?

Yeah, things like that. Actually, there will be no bird feeding in it, but you know what I mean. It could take an entire issue of her cleaning the house, as an introduction to the story.

That's the kind of stuff I love. I eat that stuff up.

That's exactly where my interest is going. When I was talking to Dylan Horrocks, he was telling me he'd read a Japanese comic book, where they'd put forty pages in to show one kiss.

Wow!

And I thought, man, that's exciting. Hopefully those were forty great pages that really worked, but to have that space to really explore the storytelling, I think is important. Nothing really dramatic happens in my life, so I don't want to do that, because it becomes melodrama, if you're making it up. I don't want to do any scenes of people bursting in and beating up some guy because he's sleeping with the girlfriend. Not that that's not real, but it doesn't ring true of my life experience. So even though it's fiction, it will be all based on my life experience, how I imagine this or that, and it will probably be pretty low key stuff. I just want to try to do a wider variety of stuff than just autobiography. Actually, I was planning to do a biography of Grey Owl, but Collier beat me to it, but I'm still thinking I might adapt...you might call this a crime story actually, there's a famous case here in Canada, back in the sixties, in the town where I grew up, actually, of a fourteen year old boy named Steven Truscott,

who was accused of the rape and murder of a twelve year old girl. It's a really interesting case, because I think he was innocent, and so sometime or other, I've been thinking, I might like to put ten or twelve issues into telling that story, but that's down the road. This is the kind of stuff, I have about eight of these stories in my head, different stories I want to do, but I'm never sure which one is going to be the next one. When I get to the end of this story right now, I'll know for sure which one I'm going to go into. Just like, I wasn't sure I was going to do this one when I started it.

You had a bunch of other ideas you were choosing from?

Yeah, it was a couple of other autobiographical stories that were going through my head at that point, and I'm glad I didn't choose them actually, because this one feels right for me, for my push towards my move to fiction. I feel like I'm learning a lot in storytelling as I'm going through this one, but I might not have learned as much if I'd done one of these other stories.

I really like how you work in what's actually going on in your head while you're doing these things.

That was a real conscious choice that I wanted to do that with this. I felt that in the first three issues, I'd almost made a mental decision that I didn't approve of narration.



That stories should only be told from the outside, and I made a pretty conscious effort to do it that way. Then, when I hit the forth issue I re-evaluated why I was thinking this. Sometimes I'm very systematic in how I think. I can remember I was going through a point in my artwork when I thought, "Artwork must only be black and white, with no shading. No grays. Grays pollute the whole thing." Then, at some point I re-evaluated that and thought, "Hey, my artwork looks much better with grays on it." So when I hit the forth issue, I thought that this is the kind of story that almost demands an interior monologue, and how can you get away with that. I thought, "I don't want to be walking around with thought balloons," so I just thought, "narration is the logical choice."

What do you think lies ahead for the future of the medium?

What do I really think, or what do I hope?

What do you really think, 'cause you kind of already talked about what you hoped.

Well, right now, it looks pretty bad. Have you heard about the big problem with the distributor that's going on right now?

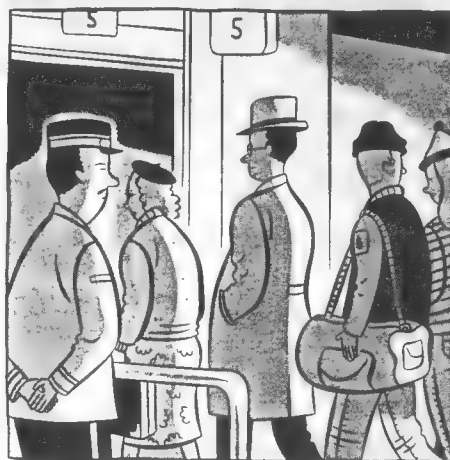
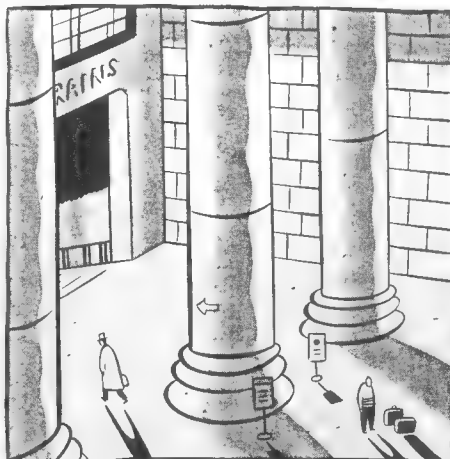
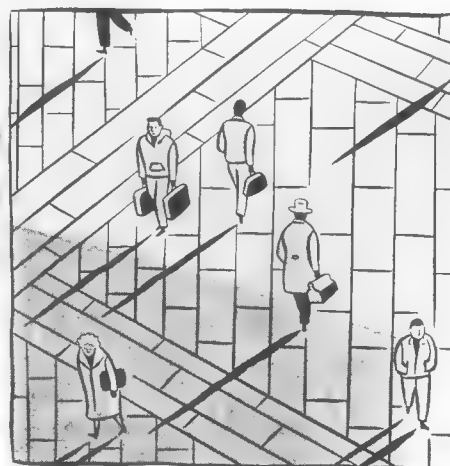
With Marvel buying Hero's World...

Yeah. There's a couple of ways it could go. My worst case scenario is the Marvel could succeed in destroying the medium. Basically, they want everything, so I could see them trying to squeeze out everybody, and if twenty years down the road, Marvel was a smart enough business to get rid of all the other businesses, even DC, I think that would be the end of comics. I think that would be the thing that pushes it into being an anachronism, like radio plays, with one product, that only is one thing, superheroes or fantasy, and I think that won't be able to sustain itself. But if we're lucky, and the alternative market continues to grow, I think the diversity that will come with that, could, and I hope, and I think a part of me really does believe, that we will open up a larger, not a much larger audience, but a large audience, who is a more literate audience. That's the kind of thing that I'm hoping, forty or fifty years from now, when the time comes for me to die, that I will see a more exciting medium happening with wider range. But part of me also says that it could just stay like this. This could be the best it gets, with this number of people reading, and you just continue to eke by. It's really hard to say. Those companies like Marvel and DC really have worked towards destroying the medium. They killed off every other genre of comics when they saw superheroes were selling well, and that kind of non-diversity...look how much less the sales of comics are. You need diversity for any medium to grow. If there were only one type of book, and they were all romances, sales on books wouldn't be too good, and I think that would be the downfall of the publishing industry. These guys are

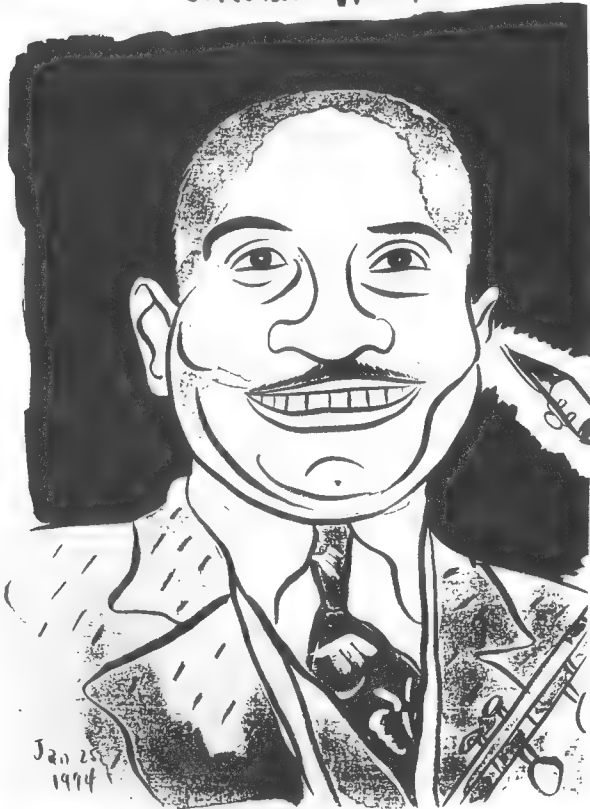
greedy, and they don't care. They only care about the short term. So, I think the alternative market, or whatever you want to call it, is really important to the medium surviving, because that's the only place where you'll find the diversity that keeps any art form alive.

END

Issues 1-6 of Palooka-Ville are available for \$2.50 US P.P.D. each, from Drawn & Quarterly, 5550 Jeanne Manse St. #16, Montreal, Que., CANADA, H2V 4K6, or write them for a free catalog.



Coleman Hawkins



Jan 25 /
1994



Helen Hokinson
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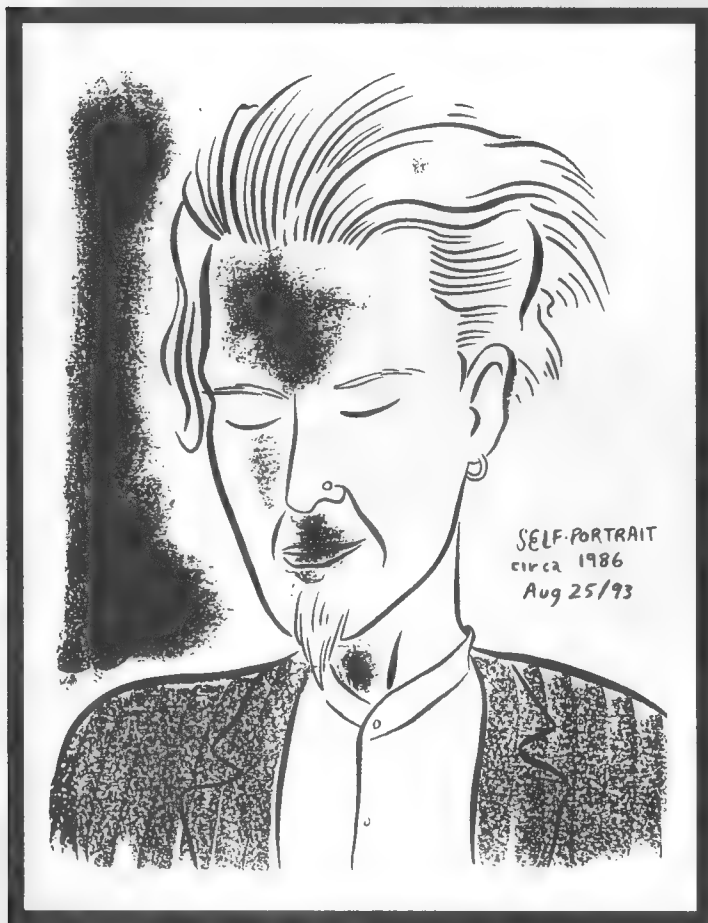
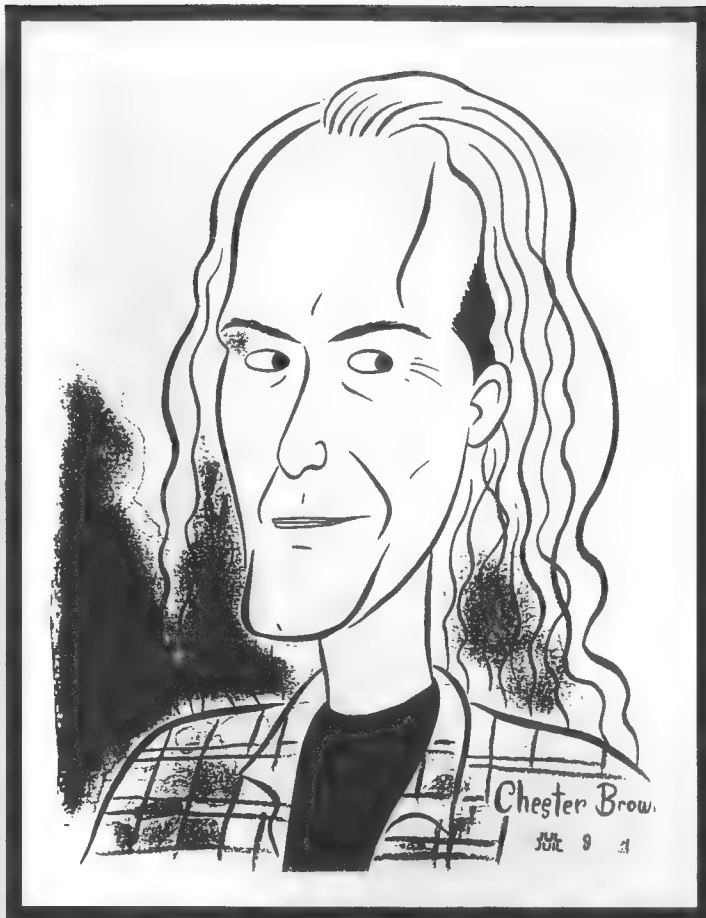
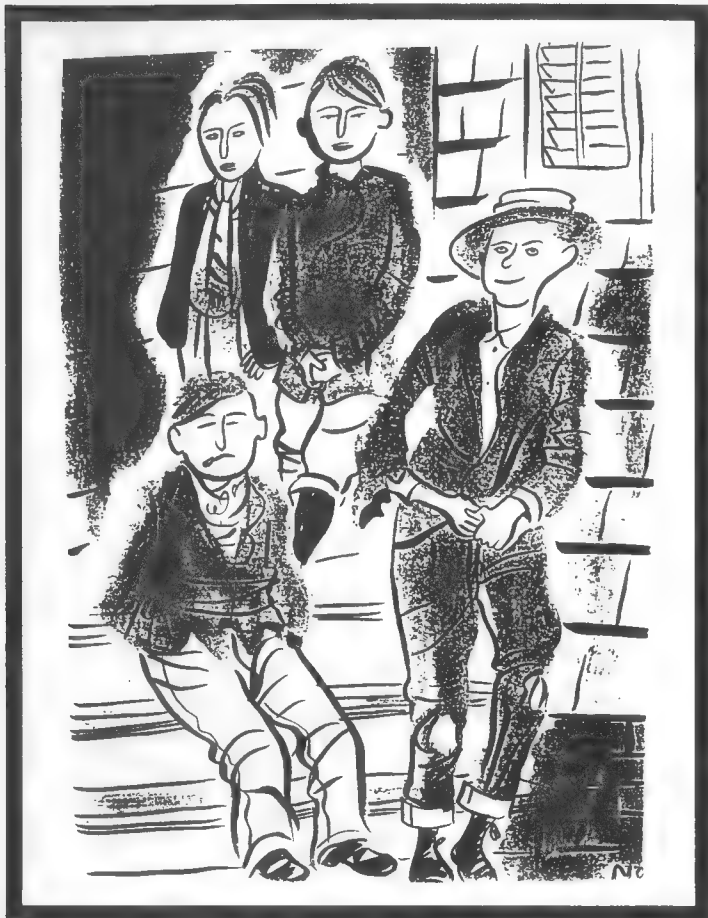


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COMICS! COMICS! COMICS by Jeff LeVine

I'm scared.

I just started drawing comics in a completely different style and I'm scared of what people's reactions are going to be. I drew six issues of my comic "No Hope" in a cartoony bug-eyed style that emphasized humor. While my comics aren't particularly popular, I think the people who read my comic expect a certain thing. With issue number seven I'm starting to give them something pretty different from what they expect, so yeah, I'm worried about what their reaction is going to be.

I don't mean to beat my own horse, but I'm pretty excited, and well, proud too. Not only am I hopeful shattering people's expectations of what they expect one of my comics to be like, but I've also shattered my own expectations of what I thought I was capable of achieving in comics. To do something different is a very liberating experience. I challenged my own abilities and made comics at a higher level than I previously thought I was capable of.

Not that I'm satisfied, though. I feel like I've just scratched the surface of what I'm capable of. I think if I can continue to push myself, and practice and hone my artistic and storytelling capabilities, that there is no limit to what I could someday achieve. That is a really fucking great feeling.

This whole experience has renewed my feelings that you must always challenge the status quo. If you aren't satisfied with the way something is, you **must** work to make it better. Sure, I probably could churn out vaguely amusing stories about getting drunk and sitting around on the couch forever, but I'm not going to. I don't want there to be any limits on what I can do, in comics, or in my life.

There's always the risk that in not giving people what they want, you may alienate them. That's a risk I have to take. I have to follow my heart...I have to make comics that come from deep in my soul. If you read my comics, I hope you'll stick around and find where I'm going more interesting than where I've been. I just want to warn you now, I'm going to continue to evolve and try new stuff as the years go by, and I honestly think my comics are only going to get better. I'm really beginning to feel that I have the potential to make something really good.

I look at "Hate" by Peter Bagge...that was a comic I really used to enjoy, but when I look at it now, it just doesn't do **anything** for me. It's become an institution or something. It's no different than a TV sitcom...a not very funny one, at that. For me, "Hate," has become a warning sign of what I want to avoid. It seems to me that Peter Bagge found he could be financially successful if he just stuck to one thing...it seems to me that once "Hate" became successful, Bagge completely stopped growing as a writer or an artist, in a big fear that he would blow his hard won, moderate, financial success.

Please don't get me wrong, I'm not anti-success. I want to be successful at least as much as anybody, I just don't want it to be at the cost of my artistic growth and validity.

Okay, Peter Bagge isn't writing "Hate" to make me happy, I know that. I just want to emphasize that I want to aim for more than "Hate," and I encourage other artists, writers, and readers too, also.



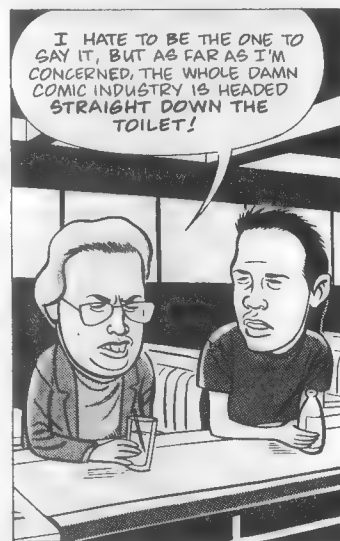
I intend to try to make comics that go for more than the easy laugh, or sitcom formula writing. I may fail, but in my heart, I know the only way to make anything good, is to reach as far out there as you can. You've got to aim for more than you know is safe and for more than you think you're capable of doing, or what you're doing is just going to be mediocre shit-work. It may pay the bills, but it won't have any reason to exist as art.

I read a recent Shannon (Too Much Coffee Man) Wheeler interview in Spa Fon #1, and I got really pissed off when he said about comics that, "You can have really terrible drawings and still communicate what you want to communicate, I think," because it indicated a really poor attitude to me, of not trying to do the best work you can do. That attitude of, "Well, it's just comics, so who cares." Sure, you can hack stuff out, but what is the fucking point? If you aren't doing the best work you can possibly do, not only are you hurting yourself, but you're also cheating your readers, and the medium. I know so many people who just pore themselves into every single drawing...and it does pay off. Comics are only a cheap, throw-away medium if that's how you treat them. I can't be satisfied with middle of the road work, and I hope nobody else lets themselves be.

Do you know why Eightball is such a consistently good comic? It's because Dan Clowes puts his everything into it, making it the best damn thing he can possibly do...and it really shows. As you look through all fourteen issues so far, you can see how Clowes is constantly pushing himself. Eightball continues to develop and progress, and I bet you it's only going to continue to improve and hold up as the years go by. Whether you like the type of stories he tells or not, you must admit, Dan Clowes is one of the ten most important artists making comics today.

Something I've finally learned about comics in the last year or so however, is that if you really want to know about comics, you've got to look at more than just the current hip creator's work, but you've got to look to the past too. In fact, I've come to appreciate a lot of the older comics more than what is being done today. Comics have a tremendously rich history, and more and more of it is being kept in print and available. You've got to dig a little bit for a lot of the best stuff, and spend a little extra money, but it's worth it.

This year is actually the one hundred year anniversary of comics as we know them (starting in the newspapers). That's a lot of history to dig through.





One old cartoonist who has really struck a nerve with me, is Saul Steinberg. I first came across his work in the New Yorker 25th Anniversary Album 1925-1950 (along with the work of a lot of other great cartoonists like Peter Arno, Charles Adams, Sam

Cobean, and Sid Hoff, amongst others). With just a simple, often shaky, line, and with more white space than anybody else ever, Saul Steinberg did so much. Unfortunately most of his books are out of print (I've only ever seen one in a new bookstore), but I've managed to dig up three and they're all great (although, I have to admit, I like his earlier work more). Dylan gave me his first book in paperback, called "All In Line," that reprints a lot of stuff that can be found in the New Yorker collection, and has a bunch of drawings he made overseas, while he was a lieutenant in the Navy and the



OSS, that are my special favorites. Just amazing drawings from China, India, and North Africa. I also have "The Art of Living," and "The Passport," both of which are much larger and more expensive, but well worth tracking down. I've seen a few other books by him too, that look pretty neat. I don't know too much about him yet (but am planning to learn more, and maybe write a big article in a future issue of this magazine). All I really know is that he made great comics, especially his earlier ones (some of the later stuff gets pretty crazy), and I think he might still be alive.



Something completely different, but also really great, are all the E.C. reprints that Russ Cochran is putting out. I'd heard a lot about E.C., but never actually read any until recently, and now I'm really into them. They're coming out regularly, and in regular comic book stores. At only \$2.00 a pop, they're on of the best deals out there. I think I enjoy the Weird Science ones the most, but I recommend them all. You're doing yourself a dis-service if you don't take advantage of this opportunity to familiarize yourself with the E.C. treasure

trove of great comics by Harvey Kurtzman, Bernie Kriegstein, Al Feldtein, and the rest of the gang.

Sometimes, I think there is still so much to learn that I shouldn't even be opening my mouth, because I'm just going to say something dumb, but one of the reasons I do this, is to learn, and sometimes I'm going to make some mistakes, or not know all the answers. Already, I'm aware that if I just studied for the rest of my life I wouldn't be able to learn all that I want to know. Every time I find the answers to one question, it makes me think of three brand new questions.

I'm pretty positive right now. There's so much exciting work being done right now, that it's really inspiring me. It seems like right now, there's a real window of opportunity for some really exciting things to happen in the world of comics, and I sure hope they do, for myself, and for you.



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"If you have no sense of humor you are in grave danger. You may die at any moment. As dangerous as it is, humor deficiency can be easily recognized by anyone. If you think you might have a humor deficiency problem stop dawdling and get this guy's mini-comic at once, before you die a miserable death."

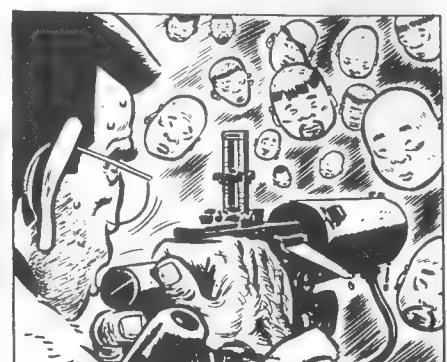
You can get happy and avert death by getting a copy of my mini-comic. Just send me one dollar (well hidden cash only, please) and include a stamp for postage. This costs a lot less than most other forms of diversion; such as music, drink, sex, drugs or a ride on the lovely subway. So don't be a foppish, misanthropic plebe, order your copy before it's too late.

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FRANK ROBBINS 1917-1994

by Dylan Williams



As a young kid growing up in the 70's I can think of only a hand full of comic artists who's styles I recognized and looked for...Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko, Herb Trimpe, Alex Toth and most of all Frank Robbins. The Invaders, Captain America, Ghost Rider, and (above all) the Human Fly, were some of my favorite comics as a kid, and one man made them look the way they did.

Only in adulthood did I find out that this above average "superhero artist" had been one of the real greats of the newspaper adventure strips and the comics medium in general.

He began drawing strips instead of making money from serious artforms. His first job, in 1939, was drawing Scorchy Smith (an aviation hero strip once drawn by Noel Sickles). At first Robbins didn't write it, but after eight months he was doing it all. He continued with Scorchy until 1944 when he was hired by a rival syndicate to draw his own version of Scorchy: Johnny Hazard.

At first Johnny Hazard did seem like just another clone in the world of strips (although the drawing was, of course, nearly without peer). Soon the story began to prove it's own though. The stories and art became intensely moody and subtle. Pictures of sad dead bodies lying in the bleak

snows of Eurasia. To me, his pictures/words are like the best of German Expressionism.

His life from there seemed prosperous and healthy, but thanks to the messed up world we live in, Robbins art suffered. He was told by editors to tighten up his art to look more like the slicksters of the day. And like a good commercial artist, he did it. While his drawing ability was never (could never be) lost, his vitality was. The strip Johnny Hazard was drawn until 1977 by Robbins (and probably assistants). He began drawing comic books in the 1960's and continued until the late 70's. His comics are great (really great), but the run of Johnny Hazard from 1944 to the mid-50's are some of the greatest stuff ever done in comics. Setting a standard that the rest of us will aspire to, but only once in a lifetime (if we're lucky) achieve.

Thank you Frank Robbins. Rest in Peace.

Write to Tony Raila, P.O. Box 14361, Long Beach, CA 90803 (w/ a stamp) for info about books by Frank Robbins.

Pictured: two consecutive daily Johnny Hazard strips by Frank Robbins from 1948.

READ THE *CRIME GLING!*



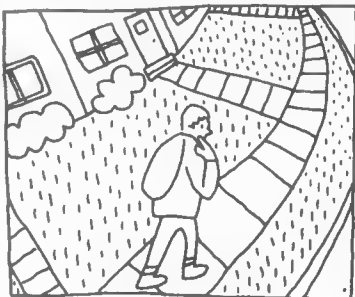
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DYLAN WILLIAMS in Stores in
May '95 from Slave Labor! 1-800-866-8929

REVIEWS

KING-CAT COMICS #47

by John Porcellino

In many ways, I think this is the best issue of King-Cat yet. One of the reasons, may be, is that John really steps out, telling a longer story (18 pages), and I think it's longer length, helps let the reader get involved. It's also kind of an ambiguous story, so you can attach your own meanings to it, kind of the way two different people can get completely different things out of the same song. This is what it meant to me. It seems to me that the quote from Jack Kerouac Vision of Cody, that it starts with, "Time is the purest and cheapest form of doom," is very telling, since the story looks back on true events from John's life in the spring of 1986. There's a certain sense of sadness that pervades this whole issue. It seems as if John really misses those more innocent days of high school, but at the same time, in the story, it seems like John is already missing the even more innocent days of his youth. Actually, this story seems in some ways, to be about the turning point in John's life from the games of his youth, to the games of his adulthood. He's starting to not fit in with his family, skipping breakfast, having adventures more with his friends and starting to see his parents as an obstacle to that, maybe thinking, "Quit bugging me, leave me alone. I'm not a kid anymore," while his



mother says "Well be careful, and not too late." In one scene, inside a thrift store he sees some children's toys and picks one up. Behind him, there is a heart, indicating his love of kids stuff, but on his face is a melancholy looks, as if he is also beginning to realize that the times for kids



games is over. See, he has a crush on this girl Tina. He's always watching her, but never communicates any of his feelings towards her. They hang out together at her dad's house, but she just talks on the phone to a friend. Later in the week, they go to see Soul Asylum with a group of friends, but can't get in because they're not twenty-one, again re-inforcing that John is in that awkward phase of transition of from childhood to adulthood, plus a nostalgia for the past, when seeing a band like Soul Asylum (at that time a pretty small, and cool, band) might have been great. Instead of seeing the show, their group of five decides to go buy some liquor, and head down to the lake. They go to the lake, but John doesn't want to drink (an adult game, that maybe he's not sure he wants to play?), and instead wanders off on his own. As he walks alone down the shore, smoke, or fog, surrealistically rolls in and surrounds him completely. John says, "I wish..." and something shoots out from

his chest. The scene pulls back and up, revealing first his friends, still drinking on the beach, and then slowly the whole city surrounding them, with it's massive quality of a million little lives. For me, John can only be wishing that he could stay a child, or at least keep within himself a spirit of the innocence and magic of childhood, which makes the Jack Kerouac quote at the beginning even more sad, and relevant.



You can order this wonderful issue of King-Cat #47, by sending \$1.00 to John Porcellino at P.O. Box 18510, Denver, CO 80218.

DRAWN AND QUARTERLY #2 various artists



I'm extremely glad that Chris Oliveros has started putting out this new series of Drawn and Quarterly anthology magazines. The quality of the stories, and the production values on the book are extraordinary. This is certainly one of the nicest looking comic book productions ever, and for the serious way that

this presents comics, I'm very grateful. It's also affordably priced, at only \$5.95 USA.

This second issue features new comics by David Mazzuchelli (who also did the covers and endpapers), Eric Drooker, Loustal and Fromental, Maurice Vellekoop, and Jacques Tardi.

Rates of Exchange, a sixteen page black and white story by Mazzuchelli, is probably the stand-out in the issue artistically. It's seemingly loose brushwork, impeccable design and creative transitions of scenes are great. The actual story itself, fell a little flat for me. It's nice to see somebody trying to tell an ambitious story, but this one never really captures the reader's interest.

The main character, an American named Anthony, checks into a cheap hotel, in Paris. The narrator says, "I think he was trying to get away from (the) silence," but Anthony, after a violent coughing spell, says he's there for his health. We watch, as Anthony silently passes other tenants of the hotel in the halls, and as he remembers other places he's been (Spain and India). He hangs out with a few people he has met in Paris, and is bored by their mundane conversations. Later, he leaves.

While I'm not too interested in Jacques Tardi's functional and professional art, I found his story of a soldier in World War I to be quite moving. He really captures the grittiness of that war. Reading his comic actually made my stomach churn, because of it's realistic and straight-forward depiction of the horribleness of war. It disgusts me, that no matter how much we work for it, the human race seems unable to escape from killing and destroying itself. Both World Wars really weren't that long ago, and it surprises me how little the younger generations know about the atrocities and great losses of those times, and scares me that even worse may be in store for the future.



On a lighter note, there's Maurice Vellekoop's "More Than Coincidence." The light-hearted tale of Tracy and Steven, who grew up only a block apart, but never met. The two page story follows both their lives, and contrasts their successes and attitudes.

While it certainly wasn't groundbreaking, it was definitely a fun little story, and Vellekoop's artwork is excellent as always.

Finally there's "The Ghost of Whitechapel, by Loustal and Fromental, in full color, that well, just kinda bored me.

I guess my problem with this comic is that, while it looks really fancy, most of the actual contents were just a little on the dull side, and not very involving. I applaud all the contributors for taking comics art seriously, but hope for more involving content in the future.

PICKLE #5

by Dylan Horrocks

Pickle is one of the most unique and pleasurable comics being



published today. It's also become very confusing, which is okay, because each page is like almost magic, and even though when I read it I'm confused and not quite sure what the point is, I'm liking it, and I'm interested.

Dylan Horrocks's art is deceptively simple on first look, but upon further examination, one realizes what a firm grasp he has of the cartooning medium. I think, there's nothing he couldn't draw if he wanted to.

A lot of Pickle is really a comic about comics, which is great by me, because comics are my favorite thing. In this issue we witness a very strange conversation that takes place in Cornucopia, with Emil Kopen, Cornucopia's greatest cartoonist, who waxes philosophically. He compares making comics to cartography, saying, "They are all the same thing: using *all* of language - not only words or pictures." He explains the theory of what currently interests him in making comics, saying, "These days I have begun to feel that stories, too, are basically concerned with spatial relationships. The proximity of bodies." This sort of mystical vision of creating comics speaks a lot to me right now. Like Seth said in the interview in this issue, so much of the comics of the past have dealt with trying to be entertaining, but now, finally, we are starting to see comics whose purpose may not be merely to entertain, but are the true vision of a real artist. The panels that Dylan draws showing the art of Kopen are especially interesting. All the text in his comics are in Cornucopt, so you really focus on the drawing, and you can see how powerful they really are. You can see how in the drawings the most important aspect is the spatial relationships between the characters, and you can see how much it really does affect the telling of the story.

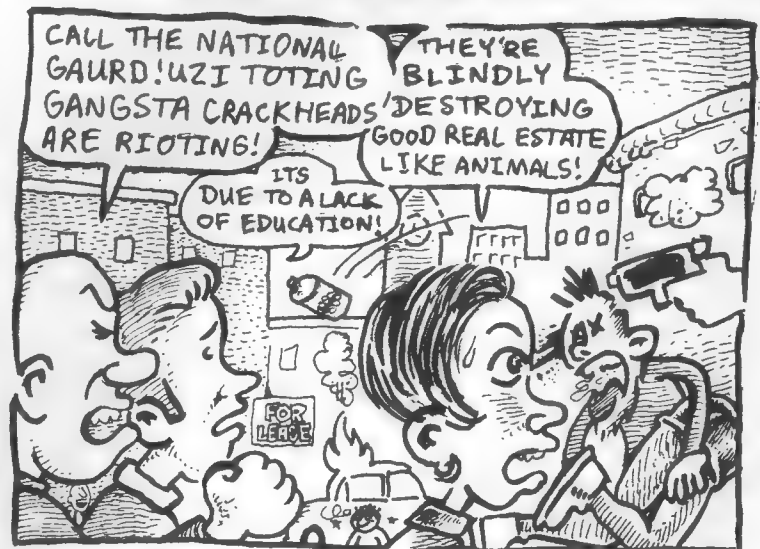
Also included in this issue of Pickle is the fourth episode of Cafe Underground. Reading this story in these short installments is getting a bit tiresome, but at the same time, it's still really interesting. Alex and Elizabeth's relationship has gotten all strange, but Alex is clueless as to why. She's been ignoring and avoiding him, and one night, in a club, he sees her kissing Gabriel, Auckland City's strange visitor. I guess he goes home in a state of denial, because we next see him over at his friend Abe's house, complaining that she hadn't been returning his phone calls for four days, that he just wanted to talk to her and know what's going on, so he went over to her house. There, in the most emotionally devastating moment of Pickle yet, he finds out what he probably already knew, but was afraid to admit to himself.

This comic is just such a weird mix of ideas, and gives you so much to think about, that I can't recommend it enough.



THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE 60's AND 90's

by Bobby Madness



ALIEN AND PLANET

©1995 BY JAMES KOCHALKA

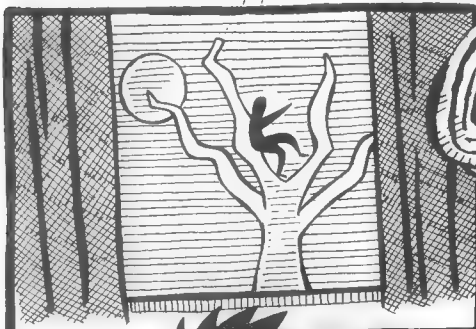


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THE NIGHT I GET
A CALL FROM

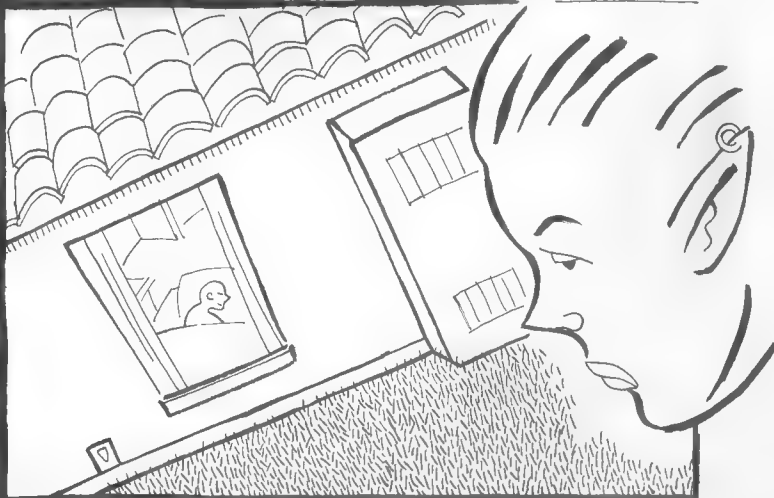
CAT WOMAN



SHE'S SINGING
IN HER TREE
HOUSE



HMM... THAT
CAT SCAT



IN THE MORNING SHE STOPS
SINGING... ONLY THEN DO
I FALL BACK ASLEEP

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Fashion Experts Agree... **BROWN is HIP!**



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FEAR AND DOUBT

by Jeff LeVine

WHO KNEW WHAT WOULD HAPPEN?



I PRESSED THE BUTTON. I TURNED LEFT
INSTEAD OF RIGHT. I SAID HELLO TO YOU.
I SLEPT IN LATE.



SO MANY CHOICES. WHICH ONE IS RIGHT?
IS THERE A RIGHT?



NOBODY KNOWS THE FUTURE. THE FUTURE
IS THE LAST GREAT ADVENTURE.



PEOPLE

by Jeff LeVine

HAVE YOU EVER NOTICED HOW WEIRD
OTHER PEOPLE CAN BE?



IT DOESN'T MATTER IF A PERSON IS
"BEAUTIFUL" OR "UGLY." THEY'RE
ALL INTERESTING AND UNIQUE.



I LIKE TO LOOK AT PEOPLE.



THE WEIRDEST THING ABOUT OTHER
PEOPLE, IS THAT NO MATTER WHAT
THEY LOOK LIKE, OR THE THINGS THEY
SAY, YOU CAN NEVER KNOW WHAT
THEY'RE REALLY THINKING.



CALIFORNIA

by John Porcellino

I WAS IN CALIFORNIA and
I WAS DRUNK.



IN the BATHROOM MIRROR
I CAUGHT A GLIMPSE OF
MYSELF and FROZE there



TRAPPED IN the UNREALITY
OF the MOMENT...



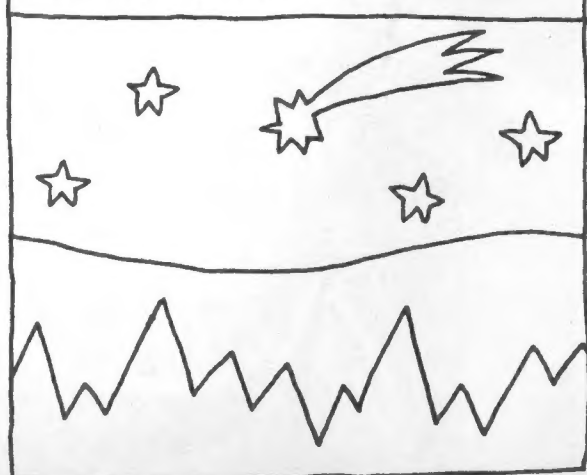
TRAPPED IN the IMPOSSIBLE
HEARTACHE



OUT ON the BACK PORCH
the SKY WAS STARS and
SO COLD MY CHEST HEAVED
CONVULSIVELY



I WAS A MILLION MILES
FROM HOME...



LETTERS

**write to Destroy All Comics C/O Jeff LeVine
1574 Hates St., San Francisco, CA 94117**

I desire your letters of comment. Let me know what you've thought of this issue, so I can work to improve this magazine in the future.

Dear Jeff, Just a quick note to say I picked up and read your first Slave Labor - Destroy All Comics and I really enjoyed it; especially your editorials and the interview with Chris Ware.

I think you did the right thing letting Slave Labor publish it, as I see it in more stores already (and no quality of content has been lost). I look forward to your future issues.
Chris Staros, North Metro, GA.

Thanks. Hopefully you'll start seeing this magazine in more stores soon, because if the orders don't start moving up, Slave Labor isn't going to be able to keep losing money putting this thing out. So, if you like this magazine and want to see that it keeps coming out, please bug your local stores to carry it. If the store you bought it from sells out, please bug them to re-order more directly from Slave Labor. With the first issue, we shipped the book at a \$250.00 loss, and since this issue sold even less, I expect things will be even worse this time around. If you like this magazine, you've got to thank Slave Labor for having enough faith in it, that so far, they actually publish it at a loss. Seriously though, if things don't get better sales wise, I don't know how much longer they'll be willing to keep it up.

Jeff, I got the new DAC #1 yesterday, and it's pretty good. The "underground" could use lots more of the type of, um, criticism, I guess, that's in James Kochalka's essay - the Kirby Vs. Picasso one. It makes people realize that cartooning does have roots (which kind of justifies it's goodness), and then makes them wonder more about what the roots are - hopefully then more people outside the tiny "underground" scene will realize that it didn't all start with that Jack Kirby type shit. I mean, nobody thinks that sci-fi writers or "fantasy" writers are major influences on literature-type stuff like Hemingway or Samuel Beckett. These Marvel/DC titles are just made for escapists and...I want to say losers...but anyway, escapism and living vicariously and all that has nothing to do with the things that make art and good comics so important. It's - it should be about life, not contrary to it. Shouldn't it? -- Ah shit, this isn't making any sense, the music's too loud for me to think. Anyway, keep it up, I like the big format of the new DAC.
Rob Schulz, Honolulu, HI

Pablo Picasso was an asshole.

In his Picasso Vs. Kirby article, James Kochalka has managed to misunderstand Barry Smith's comment about Kirby & Pablo having had a similar impact of their respective fields as well as

religious nuts in the 60's misunderstood John Lennon's quip about the Beatles becoming more popular than Jesus. I'm surprised you would print such a ridiculous article. Also, telling young cartoonists they should get inspiration from a bunch of non-sequiturs like "The Dream and Lie of Franco" is like telling a high school marching band to listen to more John Coltrane. Blind faith in Picasso, or Kirby, or in anyone can fuck you up.
David Lasky, Seattle, WA

There were things I liked and didn't like in the Kochalka article Kirby Vs. Picasso, but the main reason I printed it was to get people to at least think, which I think it succeeded in doing. The point being, that people making comics should take inspiration not only from the works of Jack Kirby and other comic book artists, but also from the world of fine art, literature and film. I honestly think that Jack Kirby was a tremendous artist, but you have to admit, a lot of those stories that he worked on were aimed at children, and while fun, don't really take advantage of the diversity of storytelling possible with comics. All the Kirby work I have seen is in one genre or another, from superhero, to romance, to monster comics, but I think the real future of comics lies in escaping from genre. It's really a pity that a genius like Kirby had to work with so many restraints on his creativity and artistic freedom, but it's truly amazing what he achieved within those limits. I can't imagine how it's bad advice for a high school marching band to listen to more Coltrane, if they ever really want to achieve anything.

Hey Jeff, ...When I finished reading the interview with Jaime Crespo and all the mini-comic reviews, I started making my own mini-comic. Then I read the interview with Chris Ware, and I had to stop and start over again. They really made me think about all the aspects of making a comic. Now I'm working a little slower, and more deliberate. I just thought you would like to know that you're doing something important with Destroy All Comics. I was kind of disappointed when I read Comics! Comics! Comics! I understand your hatred of goth Vertigo posers, but have you read some of the Sandman stories...or Grant Morrison's Doom Patrol and Animal Man. Animal Man #5 is up there with Yummy Fur #19 and Frank stories as my favorite reads...and Ann Nocenti wrote a really good storyline when she was on Daredevil with JRJR, not that I can forgive Marvel and DC for screwing little kids with the five or six cheesy titles of the same tired characters per month at a ripe \$1.50, \$2.50 for the platinum copy.
Merry Christmas, Chris Caballos, Orange, CA



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